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E. IN A MIST

BY

JESSICA DARLING

“When two lives meet there is oft a scar,
They are one and one with a shadowy third,
One near, one is too far.”

BY THE FIRESIDE

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PART I

“ And see ye not yon bonny road
That winds about the fernie brae ? ”

LOVE IN A MIST

CHAPTER I

MISS MACLEOD OF STANDALONE LEAVES SCHOOL

I

THE front door of the Mlle. Toussaints' school opened, and five or six girls drifted out on to the steps. There they paused reluctantly, for the east wind was eddying round their ankles, chilling their fingers inside their kid gloves and turning their noses a pale pink. Inside the house a guttural voice was calling in a kind of strangled whisper—"Leelie—Leelie—kommen Sie doch?"—but without receiving any response.

"Lily's always late. I votes we go on."

"Oh Tibbie! we must wait for Frollein——"

"Not! Why should we? Come on, Kathleen—we'll go anyhow. If Mina can't make Lily be in time, let *her* wait for her."

"It's no business of mine," said Mina.

"That's something new, isn't it?" commented Tibbie, with a mocking smile.

At this moment the late-comer was herded forth into their midst by the mild flatfooted Fraulein, whose pink countenance expressed an agitated severity.—"You haf kept all waiting in die cold. We wael be late for die chorch. It is not gut, Leelie," she expostulated; then, placing herself at their head, she endeavoured to throw a note of authority into the monosyllable—"So—o," and away they all walked in the direction of the Cathedral.

The grey skies scowled a threat of rain, indeed—as Tibbie remarked—it was beginning to spit already. In the Square gardens the leafless trees shivered in the blast. In a depressed silence each girl stepped over the puddles left by last night's rain, one hand clutching at her hat, and the other at her best skirt, her umbrella, and a little red book of Devotion which the Dean had given all the older girls on their confirmation, and which bade its

possessor—"On your way to Holy Communion shut your eyes to your worldly surroundings, and fix your thoughts steadily upon higher things".

At the tail end of the little procession walked Lily, the girl who had kept them all waiting. She was a pretty creature, with the piquant oval face of a Botticelli Madonna; and she was generally delightedly conscious of her own looks—indeed, although not otherwise gifted with imagination, she saw life in a series of little tableaux, with herself as the central figure. To Lily half the point of going to early service was in picturing herself as "a slim white kneeling form"; but to-day this pleasure was denied her for, in the fuss and worry of being late, she had been obliged to hurry into the first dress she could find—her old blue serge. . . . Mina knew where all her clothes were. She always helped her to dress for early church. And to-day, for the first time since they had become "greatest friends," Mina had simply dressed herself and flounced from the room, leaving Lily standing in her petticoat!

With rising irritation she glanced at the small red-haired girl who was walking beside her. What did Clytie MacLeod mean by always tacking herself on whether she was asked to or not? Did she really imagine that she, Lily, would dream of making a friend of *her*—simply because she had been kind to her that once she found her crying in the box-room! For one pleasant moment Lily visualised the scene, with Clytie a vague blubbering figure in the background, and herself, in her simple brown dress, bending over her with a sweet compassionate face. . . . It had been like her to do it—but for all that it had been a great take. It had made Mina think that Lily was taking up with MacLeod because she was "county" and had grand relations, whereas really of course it was not that at all, but simply goodheartedness. "If you imagine, Mina" (said the table-lily, with flashing eyes and trembling lips)—"that any conditions of that kind could influence me——" At this moment St. George's clock struck eight. Fraulein and her two girls quickened their pace, and their swinging skirts disappeared round the corner into the Cathedral grounds.

"And now we're late!" snapped Lily.

Her unwelcome companion started, and looking at her heavy miserable eyes, asked—"What did you say?"

"I said we *were* late!"

"I don't think we will be. And what does it matter? . . . only a few minutes—nobody'll notice—"

"Do you mind please *not* talking—just before we go to Holy Communion," interrupted Lily.

"I don't want to talk," said Clytie.

A flush of indignation rose to Lily's cheeks. The idea of a new girl answering back like that! There was no time to speak out her mind, for the side door was near, and they must slip in by it. . . . The service had begun, as she had feared, and the school seats being right up in the front of the aisle, it was impossible to go there now. With a modest and reverent air she knelt down in the nearest seat, and bowed her head over her hands. As she did so, she reflected—"Of course Clytie MacLeod will come here too, and I shan't be able to pray a bit". Clytie however did not follow her, but wandered away in her squeaking shoes to the deserted seats by the font. "How can anyone make a noise like that, when the service is going on?" thought Lily, then with an effort she turned her mind in the direction of her own sins. She had not prepared properly for Holy Communion last night. . . . She had forgotten to say her prayers several mornings. . . . She had shown pride towards Mina, instead of gently and lovingly making her see that the whole thing was a misunderstanding. . . . The young advocate who always took the collection, came in late, and sat down behind her. Instinctively Lily assumed an attitude of rapt devotion; and when he handed her the bag, she looked past him with a far-away expression, dropped in her threepenny bit, and sank her forehead on her folded hands again. She felt sure he was saying to himself—"What a lovely place!" . . .

A subdued rustling of petticoats was heard, and dark kneeling forms blotted out the altar rails. Lily left her seat, and with bent head and clasped hands tiptoed up the aisle.

Clytie MacLeod was now the only person left in the back of the cathedral. Crouching on the edge of her chair—for growing girls in tire of kneeling—she gazed, awestruck, up the vista of soaring columns, which, like the beech trees of the Standalone avenue in the gloaming, lost themselves in the shadows above. How mysterious, how holy, the Cathedral looked in this dim morning light. A single ray of sunshine stole in through the east window, hung for a moment like a Shekina above the altar. Then it faded, and rain began to patter on the lofty roof.

She had come to church simply for the sake of this half-hour one, away from the other girls: but now the thought took possession of her that God must be specially here, in this beautiful

place, and that, if He listened to those people by the altar where the priests were moving to and fro with strange low murmurings, He would surely listen to her too, because she was so very very miserable. Claspings her hands together, she prayed passionately—"Oh Almighty God—dear Father hear my prayer—let me go home again, let me go home. Forgive me my sins. Oh God have mercy on me, and let me go home." . . . She prayed thus, repeating the same words again and again; and her eyes became full of tears, which presently rolled down her cheeks. She fumbled for her handkerchief, but had, as usual, forgotten to bring one, so, raising the hem of her frock, she buried her face in her white petticoat. "If you don't let me go home, I'll die—I'll just die"—she desperately assured her creator. A sudden gust of sobs shook her; then, at the sound of approaching footsteps, she stiffened into the conventional attitude of prayer. . . . It was only the woman in the bonnet who gave out the prayer books. She did not think she had noticed. She had been afraid it was Lily; and though Lily was kind—the only one who ever was kind to her—she didn't want her to come. She wanted nobody.

Lily never returned to that part of the church after all. She had left the altar rails at the same moment as Mina, and followed her back to the school seats where they knelt down together. Presently Lily had the satisfaction of feeling a timidly affectionate hand slipped into hers.

Out in the rainy daylight again, neither spoke, but Mina, putting up her umbrella, held it carefully over her friend's hat—quite in the old manner. Slowly they walked round the corner of the Cathedral, postponing their little scene of explanation and forgiveness until the other girls had gone on in front. They however were donning their waterproofs in the porch and did not immediately appear. "We might go back by Morton Street. The others always go by Shandon Place," suggested Lily; to which Mina fervently replied "*Lily—darling!*"

It was at this emotional moment that Clytie MacLeod suddenly appeared beside them, and silently held out a pair of kid gloves which Lily had left on her seat.

Mina stiffened, and let go her friend's hand.

In a voice more nipping than the east wind, Lily addressed the intruder—"Clytie MacLeod—will you kindly understand that when I want your company, I'll *ask* for it!"

Bewildered at this unexpected rebuff, Clytie drew back, and Lily and Mina passed on, at first in a majestic silence, but not for long. Dreadfully distinct sentences presently floated back from

under the umbrella into Clytie's burning ears: "Always showing herself in where she isn't wanted—taking advantage of my kindness!"—"Indeed Lily—I've been wondering how long you'd stand it. You've been far too kind." . . . "I *had* to speak out. Some people can't take a hint. And it was really time to put a stop to it." . . .

Meantime the other girls had come out of church, and, headed by Fräulein, they came marching by. They all stared to see Clytie MacLeod standing in the middle of the wet path with a face the colour of the setting sun; but, except for Fräulein's kindly—"Komm Cleitee," none of them invited her to walk with them. They did not like the new girl. The verdict had early gone forth—"She tries not to be like other people. Let's leave her alone." Her subsequent look of sullen misery puzzled and annoyed them. They were very happy at school: why couldn't she be too? But when, at a little dance the week before, her depression had suddenly vanished, and she had become joyfully excited, "heuching" at the top of her voice in the reel, and actually inviting senior girls to dance with her, all were affronted; and there was a general feeling of satisfaction when Mlle. Charlotte, with the remark that she was "*trop excitée*," sent her to bed with the quite little ones.

"What's Clytie MacLeod standing there for?" they now asked each other; "she *is* a fool;" and they hurried breakfastwards.

When the last short skirt had disappeared round the corner of the Chapter house, Clytie's chin sank upon her jacket. She burst into a flood of tears, and furiously flung Lily's new kid gloves into a puddle.

2

Between the select seminary for young ladies, with its corseted gentility and its surface-skimming accomplishments, and the modern Girls' school, with its staff of diplomaed mistresses, its playing fields, its almost quixotic code of honour, so great a gulf lies, that it is of the nature of a miracle that the obstinately conservative British parent should, after a little jibbing, have cleared it at a bound. But in the prehistoric time of which we are writing, many mothers still shrank from the new regime. Forlornly perusing prospectuses wherein hockey and mathematics jostled each other, they had a vision of Mary and Alice emerging from such a school as "the kind of girls men don't care about". To such ladies the Milles. Toussaints' establishment presented itself as a satisfactory

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half-way house. Its curriculum was imposing, yet its fees were not absurdly beyond what one expects to pay for the education of a girl. Hockey was taboo. In the winter the pupils walked in the good old-fashioned crocodile along the country roads; while in summer, although they played cricket, it was only in the Square gardens, and under the supervision of Mlle. Victorine, whose Gallic cries of "Ronne-ronne"—"bien battu"—"ne boulez pas si vite!" lent quite an academic flavour to the game. The scantiness and eccentricity of the English of both Mademoiselles seemed in itself a guarantee that their pupils must perforce learn French; while with regard to the Scotch accent which permeated other schools in the town, Mlle. Victorine was inexorable, sometimes refusing to accept otherwise amiable girls as pupils, on the ground that their Eastonburgh accent might infect her select flock.

The schoolhouse was a solid early-Victorian building, situated in one of the best squares of the town, and capable of accommodating at a pinch about twelve boarders, two or three to each bedroom, and no new-fangled nonsense of cubicles or dividing curtains. The bulk of the pupils were day girls; but as they came to school at nine in the morning, and were not fetched away until six in the evening, it was as good as having your daughter at a boarding school, and not half the expense. Most of them belonged to the solidly respectable Bourgeoisie of the town; but among the boarders were several daughters of country gentlemen, two honourables (sisters) and—the Lady Mary Blight! That a real English countess should have entrusted her child to Mlle. Victorine's care was undoubtedly the prime asset of the school. When I add that the cuisine was excellent, that on week days the thirty girls wore pretty rose-coloured ribbons round their straw hats, while in summer, at church, every boarder was dressed in white, it can be understood why the Mles. Toussaints' was a flourishing institution.

Mlle. Victorine herself was a tall sallow woman, of indomitable will and considerable originality. All her emotions were on the grand scale. She could be ruthlessly severe, or lavishly generous, according to her mood. On a fine summer's day she had been known of a sudden to proclaim a whole holiday, to charter cabs by the half-dozen, and strawberries by the gross, and drive away out into the pleasant wooded country, surrounded by her flock. On such occasions her grim face was transfigured by smiles, even as the old grey town in which she dwelt was changed by sunshine. Indifferent health and unlimited power made her, however, liable to terrific outbursts of irritation. When Mlle. Victorine stormed, even her favourites trembled and wept, and her classes cowered

under the hail of, sometimes unmerited, punishments which crashed upon their heads.

Impossible to imagine this Napoleon of the schoolroom in the subdued and neutral position of a private governess; but such had been her lot for many years,—an Emily Brontë with her “Wuthering Heights” unwritten; yet, like the Brontës, with a dream-school ever before her as the goal of her ambition. Nine years before this, her dream had become a reality. Mlle. Victorine adored her school. Within its walls she was loved and feared, and she was absolute, which things were as much a necessity to her as husband and children to women of gentler mould. The masculine being strong in her (of the feminist movement she could not sufficiently express her contempt) she liked best the ultra-feminine type of girl. The kittenish grace of the little ones, the gentle rounding of approaching womanhood, were alike delightful to her. She did not desire to find originality or strength of character in her pupils, but rather, a playful wit, a merry heart, and a pleasing appearance. The spotted or clumsy, the lanky and the fat, she must perforce endure for the sake of their numerical importance, but never had she been known to choose a favourite from among them.

That the girls should one and all be happy at her dream-school, was of course a foregone conclusion. Never had she believed the contrary to be conceivable, until, of late, the extreme misery manifested in every line of the ugly little girl called Clytie MacLeod had forced itself upon her unwilling eyes. In this self-contained busy contented school world, the Highland girl was as unhappy as a little trout, jerked out of its mountain burn, and left, with bleeding mouth, to gasp away its life on the hot shingle. “A pleasant sunny beach,” chirp the sparrows, picking about among the gravel. “Hell and death!” sobs the dying trout.

3

On that Sunday morning when Lily rebuffed her, Clytie had been at school nearly six weeks, and her homesickness was at its height. Things had not always been as bad as this, of course. For the first few weeks new-comers were left in the hands of Mlle. Charlotte, the younger sister, who was a past mistress in the art of smoothing down corners, until an uncompromisingly square girl fitted painlessly into the round school hole prepared for her. With Clytie MacLeod Mlle. Charlotte had taken especial pains. She seated her by her side at meals, petted her untiringly, and

repeated her shy remarks, down the table to Mlle. Victorine, laughing as if they had been miracles of wit. Adroitly this bright little French horse-breaker with one hand held out the apple or the sugar to the rough Highland colt, while the other imperceptibly slipped the bridle over its head. Now it is by no means unpleasant to learn for the first time that your hair is an exquisite colour; to be told that your exercises on the trapeze are a marvel of agility, and that you yourself are "*une petite originale!*" So, for the first few days Clytie, although shy and bewildered, was not actively unhappy.

Every morning at eleven a bell rang, and the classes poured out into the hall, where plates of thick bread and butter awaited them. Sitting a little apart from the rest, Clytie observed them with extreme curiosity—they were so unlike the only girls she had known before, the Macphersons who lived six miles from Standalone, and were small and brown, and even shyer than herself. Those schoolgirls—how they ate and chattered and ragged, and whispered, and giggled violently on the least provocation! They did not seem to mind things as Highland people did. The first time that Clytie heard Mlle. Victorine scold a girl, she felt quite sick. The girl cried—quite a big girl too!—before everybody at lunch she gulped and sniffed, and dried her eyes with her napkin. Clytie felt that even to look at her would be horribly unkind; but the other girls simply stared; and when she had left the room in a series of explosive sobs, they all went on eating their pudding as if nothing had happened! The scene remained as a disquieting eddy in Clytie's mind.

"You veel soon be won of us," Mlle. Charlotte had assured her on the first day. But three weeks passed, and four, and Clytie still seemed to be as markedly herself, and a being apart from the rest, as she had been in the beginning. Mrs. Macpherson had said that the great thing of going to school was that you made such nice friends. Yes?—but how? How was she to make friends with those other girls, who did not want in the least to hear about Standalone or Aunt Betsy or Nanna—not about anything which had been Clytie's life until now. Their talk was all of the school, of Jeannie this and Mary that, and what Mlle. Victorine said when Mr. Pecker complained about the giggling in the second class. Whether Clytie was interested or not, seemed a matter of complete indifference to them; and she discovered that if she ventured to join in and express any opinion of her own, it was regarded as "*rather cheek*".

At last came an evening when she leaned out of the window

her tiny bedroom, her thin elbows resting on the smutty sill, and her eyes gazing fiercely into the darkness. Those houses opposite had fascinated her at first, especially at night when the windows became squares of light, across which human silhouettes mysteriously moved. Sometimes a housemaid forgot to pull down the blind, and then she could see everything which went on in the room. That was almost as good as being able to make oneself invisible, and walk into any house in the town. . . . But this evening the houses opposite seemed like a line of black mantled figures, with smouldering malicious eyes.

The raw air struck against her burning cheeks. Her heart was pounding with anger and misery. . . . Mlle. Victorine had scolded her! As she was leaving the dining-room after supper, she had called to her in a harsh voice, telling her to pull down her blouse behind, as she would not have a girl at her school who looked like a hunchback! Other things too she had said, about untidiness and laziness, ending with—"A sullen girl—that I cannot endure!" And everybody had heard her, the strange lady who was staying in the house, and all the girls! Remembering the humiliation of that moment, she trembled with rage. How dared she speak to her in such a way, that foreign woman? It was unendurable! . . . and the worst of it was that she, Clytie, had found nothing to answer, but had slunk out of the room like a whipped puppy.

In the street a German band began to play "Kennst du das Land wo die Orangen blühen". Without in the least meaning to listen to it, Clytie did so, and gradually the troubled tide of her mortification ebbed, until the scene in the dining-room was washed to the back of her mind, and a quiet melancholy stole over her. She became conscious of the stars peeping out through the cloud of smoke overhead, and of the wind sighing through the branches of the poplar tree in the back green. Then presently, in the strangest way, she seemed to hear the voice of Standalone, softly but insistently calling to her through the darkness. . . . "Come back—come back—" it seemed to say—"come back to Standalone. We are all waiting for you. The waters of the loch are grey and sad. The burns are red with spate. The Sound is all white horses, and Ardnamurchan Point is hidden by mist. There isn't a snowdrop up in the garden yet. How can the flowers come back till you come too? We want you. We are waiting for you. Clytie—come back—come back to Stand-a-lo-one." . . . The roofs opposite became blurred, and turned into the swelling lines of the moor.

A cab rattling through the square was nothing but the roar of a wave breaking upon the beach. A burst of laughter and girlish voices came up from the room below . . . but that was a dream only. All this was a dream, from which she would waken soon in her own room at Standalone, and see through the window the waters of the Sound, with Mull on the other side, and Coll and Tíree floating on the horizon. . . .

As suddenly as it had begun, the music stopped; and she was back again at school, choking with tears and racked with homesickness. And somebody, flinging the door open without knocking, was telling her in a peremptory voice that Mlle. Charlotte said she was to come down *at once* and join in the games in the "petit salon".

4

Lily and Mina were sitting close together on the rug in front of the schoolroom fire. From the floor below rose the sound of many prancing feet. A commanding feminine voice called—"Take your expanders". It was the dancing lesson afternoon; that was how Lily and Mina had the room to themselves. They were gossiping in confidential whispers.

"I *am* sorry for Tibbie and Kathleen having Clytie MacLeod foisted upon them. Just think if she'd been put in our room—" Mina was saying.

"I wouldn't have stood it—a girl like that," said Lily, whose half-contemptuous patronage of Clytie had become active dislike since the scene outside the Cathedral.

"They're simply wild about it. They say you wouldn't believe her untidiness—clothes all over the place, and——"

"Kathleen says she never washes."

"Oh that's not true." Mina was conscientiously accurate even in her dislikes. "I know I never go to my bath without finding her there. Why if you please she took to dressing in there with the door snibbed and me waiting in the passage to get in. I went straight to Mamzelle Charlotte. She put a stop to it double quick time!"

"You *are* splendid, Mina."

"Pretended she did it because she didn't like dressing before the other two—such rot! I've no patience with all that trying to be unlike other people. Did you hear how she flew out at Kathleen the other day?"

"No——"

"Yes she did. Kathleen and some of the others were saying how beastly it must be for girls who did lessons at home and never went to school, and of course Clytie MacLeod must begin contradicting and talking rot about living in the country and so on. So Kathleen told her to shut her mouth because she was a living warning herself against bringing up girls at home. Then Clytie MacLeod's face grew as red as a turkey-cock's, and she banged out of the room shouting that if we were in the Highlands *she* wouldn't be allowed to know any of us, because her aunt wouldn't think us *suitable*!"

"Well!" ejaculated Lily. "That remark simply shows she isn't a lady herself."

"She ought to be, then; her mother was an earl's daughter," said Mina rather wistfully.

"Her mother ran away from her father and could have been divorced if he'd cared to do it," cried Lily, her face aglow with vulgar excitement, for she had been hugging this secret to herself for twenty-four hours.

"What?"

"It's absolutely true. My cousin Muriel told me, only you musn't tell a soul because I swore I wouldn't repeat it. She was the Lady Alice MacLeod; and she left her husband and baby and ran away with another man."

Mina's honest countenance passed from incredulity to horror. "But then—if she did that—Clytie's mother was a bad woman—" she murmured.

"Of course she was," said Lily triumphantly. "Whichever way you look at it she was a person *our* mothers wouldn't have called on."

"How awful. I never heard of such a thing in my life."

"Naturally not. Cousin Muriel oughtn't really to have told me about it," said Lily with an air of maidenly modesty.

There was a short silence. Mina was shocked and thrilled. One part of her mind shrank timidly away from the vista of hardly guessed-at things which Lily's story suggested; but all the rest of her tingled with curiosity to hear more. "Who did she run away with?" she whispered at last.

"Hush! Somebody's coming"—cried Lily; "I'll tell you later"; and they sprang apart to their separate desks.

The door opened and a throng of flushed little girls in white frocks poured into the room.

Clytie was not among them. The dancing lesson, always an hour of tribulation to her, had been worse than usual to-day.

Too wretched to take pains, she had moved awkwardly, ever out of step and time, through the various dances, until the mistress's reproofs became positively envenomed. Clytie was screamed at and imitated. The youngest girl in the class, a child of six, was called out to show her how to do it. Finally she was made to chasser up and down the floor by herself, while the other girls tittered. Her face became a mask of sullenness, and she stopped even trying to point her toes. When the lesson was at an end she fled, choking with wounded pride and rage, up to the bedroom which she now shared with Tibbie and Kathleen. She found it empty, but full of horrid sound, for the right wall vibrated with the rapid unceasing clash of scales, while from the left a violin, sawed by an inexperienced bow, emitted a discordant wailing. Clytie plunged into the cupboard like a terrier into a rabbit hole, flinging her own and other people's things here and there, until she discovered her writing case. She carried it over to her bed, and began passionately scribbling the following letter:—

"MY DARLING NANNA,—When you get this you must please go over to Mrs. Macpherson's at once and tell her that this school she has sent me to is the most awful place in the world and will she please come and take me away because I cannot stay here any longer. O make her come soon for I cannot live away from Standalone and you any longer. I will write to my brother when I get home and tell him why I left but I *cannot* wait for his answer all the way from India and——"

The door opened abruptly, and a fat middleaged-looking girl entered carrying a violin case and a roll of music. At the sight of Clytie she raised her eyebrows.

"C'est l'heure du préparation," she remarked.

Clytie went on writing without raising her head.

"You've no business up here just now, Clytie MacLeod. You ought to be downstairs doing your lessons. I can't practise with you in the room."

"But I'm writing a letter—a most *important* letter. Do practise in another room, Grace, just this once—*please* do," cried Clytie in a tone of the gentlest and most winning entreaty. At Standalone when she used this tone Nanna always yielded, but it seemed to have no effect upon her stolid schoolfellow.

"I decline to do anything of the sort. This is the room I always practise in."

"But—you *can't* practise here, with those two playing already, just through the wall."

The fat girl was taking her fiddle out of the case and propping

up her music against the looking-glass. Twanging at the strings in what seemed to Clytie a deliberately insulting manner, she retorted—"Perfect rot. What difference does it make, if you've got an ear? Go along now. I've no time to waste arguing."

"I just *won't*," muttered Clytie in a trembling voice. Tears of rage were rising to her eyes, and her hands tingled with a desire to smite.

"Very well," said Grace, laying down her violin upon the dressing-table: "then I shall go straight down and tell Mlle. Victorine!" . . . This awful threat producing no effect, she burst out angrily—"You're the most disagreeable girl in the school, Clytie MacLeod—everybody says so—but you're going a bit too far this time. . . . Of course we all know why you're so rough and common. It's because you've been brought up by servants! Mlle. Charlotte told us you were the day she had to send you to bed because you didn't know how to behave at a dance."

A minute later she was running for her life down the stairs, with a great splodge of ink upon her heaving bosom. The incredible had happened, for Clytie MacLeod had first flung her fountain pen straight at her, and had then followed it up by a personal onslaught of such fury that retreat was the only possible course. . . . Nor was this all. As she bounded heavily down the second flight, she heard a bang followed by a dismal wailing of strings, which could only mean that her splendid new ten pound violin had been pitched violently into the passage.

It was nearly six, and the older girls were standing in a little group round Grace by the hall fire, listening with intense indignation to her tale of woe, their eyes fixed on that ink stain which had completely ruined her blouse—her best blouse! the one she only wore on Sundays and at the dancing class. Meantime on the other side of the Bibliothèque door the voice of Mlle. Victorine rumbled ominously and unceasingly, like the boom of an angry sea heard inland. Occasionally her voice swelled to a crescendo of indignation. When this occurred, even Grace paused in her narrative, and they all listened in an awestruck silence. Clytie was in there, closeted with both the Miles, for Mlle. Charlotte had been summoned also. The broken violin was there too, its strings unbraced, its bridge flat,

a crack in its stomach—at which lamentable sight Grace had wept like a girl of ten.

In excited whispers they began discussing what would be done to Clytie MacLeod for this. The general opinion was that she would be expelled. "But first," said Jessy Stainton who was deeply read in school stories,—“first she'll have to beg Gracie's pardon before the whole school.”

“She'll have to buy me a new violin though, and a new blouse as well,” cried Grace, showing a tendency to weep again.

“Then she'll be locked up in her own room until her father comes to take her away,” continued Jessy. In a shocked whisper Mina interpolated—“but he's dead!”—to which Jessy, after a disconcerted pause, made answer —“Well . . . her guardian then.”

“The absolute effrontery of the way she came downstairs, and walked past us all with her nose in the air, as if nobody was there!—That's what I can't get over,” burst out Lily. “What can you do with a girl like that?”

“What she wants is a jolly good whipping,” said Tibbie, a large rawboned girl from Aberdeen, with high cheek bones and a blunt offhand manner, sister to half a dozen brothers very like herself.

“If it was a boys' school she'd get a public flogging!” cried Jessy.

“I don't see it matters whether she's a boy or a girl,” said Kathleen, roughly (—every one always felt it was a pity Kathleen was so rough, as, except Lily, she was the prettiest girl in the school). “If y' want to know what I think, she ought to get something for this which she won't forget in a hurry; and I'm ready to do it myself this very evening, if any of you'll help me.”

“I'll help you for one,” said Tibbie—“And so will I,” cried Jessy.

“Oh no, Tibbie—Jessy, how can you encourage them?” cried Mina, her conventional schoolgirl soul shocked at such a suggestion. “That would never do, would it, Lily?”

Lily returned no answer, but Jean Gillespie, who was the oldest girl in the school, chimed in with a decisive—“Of course not. Girls never do things like that.”

“What rot!” muttered Kathleen, rather abashed all the same.

A voice from the Bibliothèque called—“Grace!”

Grace started, grew pink with importance, and stumped into the Bibliothèque. With a loyalty which they had scarcely ex-

pected of her at such a time, she left the door ajar, so that what followed was perfectly audible. . . . Mlle. Victorine's voice was saying—with a controlled violence which was quite terrifying—"La voilà donc, cette Grace et sa blouse que vous avez abîmée. Quand a son violon—regardez donc!—A l'instant vous lui demanderez pardon de votre méchanceté incroyable!" . . . then Mlle. Charlotte, rapidly translating—"You will apologise to Grace immediately, Clyté."

After a considerable pause, a voice, stiff with sullenness, answered "Nong!"

"Mais comment? Vous dites?" demanded Mlle. Victorine in an awful tone, and there was another pause, during which Jessy Stainton began stealing towards the door. She peered in through the chink, and excitedly beckoned to Kathleen to come too. They all came of course, tiptoeing with elaborate precaution over the tiles. Unfortunately Tibbie's shoes, which had an inveterate habit of squeaking, betrayed their approach. A harsh voice cried—"Fermez-moi cette porte!" The door was shut in their faces.

Chapfallen they returned to the fireplace, where Jean Gillespie alone had conscientiously remained. As they stood there, they heard a high savage voice cry, amid a storm of sobs—"I won't—I *won't*. I *want* to be sent—to be sent away——"

"Did you hear?" . . . "Did you ever—*Well!*"—"Oh shut up!"—(this from Kathleen of course)—"here's Grace."

Grace hurried towards them, satisfaction radiating from every curve of her plump face. "She's got to buy me a new violin, and pay for my blouse being cleaned at Pullar's. Mlle. Victorine said so."

"But she wouldn't beg your pardon?" they chorused.

"No. Just fancy, she——"

"Then she'll be expelled," cried Jessy.

"No. She won't. Because she said she wanted to be, and Mlle. Charlotte——"

But at this point the Bibliothèque door opened yet again, and Mlle. Charlotte herself appeared, holding by the arm Clytie, whose face was distorted by her effort to stop crying. "Pas un mot! pas un mot!" Mlle. Charlotte was enunciating in tones of irrevocable severity. "Vous allez vous coucher tout de suite comme une toute petite fille . . . vous n'aurez que du pain sec pour votre souper. Personne ne vous parlera—~~personne~~—jusqu' à ce que vous ayez demandé pardon!" Turning her head towards the group at the fire, she repeated in heightened

tones—"défence de parler a Clyté MacLawd—comprenez vous?" Then, like a trim steam tug with a small pirate tramp in tow, she sailed across the hall and up the stairs.

6

Clytie lay in bed with her eyes fixed on the ceiling. She had remained in this attitude, silent and motionless, ever since Mlle. Charlotte, with quick indignant movements had collected all the story-books in the room, turned down the gas, and rustled away (those were the days of glacé silk petticoats) locking the door behind her. Since then the supper bell had rung, and the sound of the girls' feet trooping down to the dining-room was heard. Ten minutes later the door was unlocked. Louise the *bonne* entered, bearing a tray containing a glass of water and a slice of bread, which she deposited in silence by Clytie's bed. She moved heavily about the room, picking up Kathleen and Tibbie's nightgowns and slippers, and their brushes from the dressing-table. Then she too went away and there was again silence in the room.

After so long an interval that perhaps, without knowing it, Clytie had fallen asleep, the sound of the key turning in the lock startled her into quivering wakefulness. It must be the other girls coming to bed. Alas! she thought they would have been made to sleep in another room to-night. She lay perfectly still with her eyes shut. There was a whispering of several voices by the door. Then quite a procession of slippered feet seemed to approach her bed, and a voice said, solemnly, but with an undercurrent of excitement in its tone—"Clytie MacLeod".

Clytie's body became positively rigid in her effort to feign slumber. Above her head the voices whispered again, in consultation.

"She's sound asleep. I think we'd better give it up——"

"Nonsense, Grace. If you're going to back out of it now—Why, it's a chance in a hundred Mamzelle Charlotte being out to-night."

"She's not asleep either—she's just shamming!" said Tibbie's voice. "You'd better chuck that, Clytie MacLeod," she added in so menacing a tone that, without in the least meaning to do so, Clytie found herself sitting up, and staring in amazement at the group before her. Tibbie was there, and Kathleen, and Jessy Stainton, and in the background fat Grace, looking rather

uneasy. Their scarlet flannel dressing-gowns gave an ominous suggestion of night and the Inquisition to the scene.

"We want to know," said Tibbie, "whether you're going to beg Grace's pardon for what you did to her."

"Yes—whether you'll beg her pardon, now, on your knees, and promise to beg it again to-morrow morning before Mlle. Victorine," said Jessy.

There was a long pause.

"You won't. Very well," said Tibbie. "Then—we're just going to give you the licking you deserve."

At those awful words, Jessy with an excited flourish produced something which she had hitherto carried hidden under her dressing-gown, and brandished it in the air.

"Do you know what this is? It's a birch rod—a real one, like they use at boys' schools. Mlle. Charlotte got it for the tableaux last term. It's been lying in the cupboard ever since, and nobody ever thought it would be used again. But—it's going to be used to-night, Clytie MacLeod, unless you beg Grace's pardon this minute."

They all moved nearer to the bed.

"Stop," said Tibbie. "We ought to give her one last chance now she knows. Come here Grace." (Grace advanced goggling with excitement and apprehension.) "Now Clytie. This is your last chance. Will you beg her pardon?"

Clytie's heart was beating as if it would suffocate her. She stared at them with the bewildered and helpless terror which one sees sometimes in the eyes of a very little child. They all thought she was going to apologise, and Jessy, Tibbie, and Kathleen, felt blank disappointment. Grace however—who was consumed with fears that Clytie would tell Mlle. Victorine next day, gave a smirk of relief and satisfaction. "You must get out of bed and kneel down and do it properly y'know," said she, advancing.

"I will not," muttered Clytie.

"You won't beg pardon!"

"No. I won't."

"*Very* well." With a judicial air Tibbie signed to the other girls, and herself laid hold of Clytie's arm. A furious blow on the nose dispelled her calm, and the scene deteriorated into a struggling disorder. "Get hold of her other arm will you."—"Take care, she's trying to roll off the bed!"—"Keep her feet still, Jessy, you fool. Grace, you help her. . . . That's right." . . . Four pairs of hands were grasping at Clytie's wildly resisting

body. She fought like a demon, striking out, kicking, biting even. It was of no avail. Her arms were pinioned, and eleven stone, in the form of Grace, settled down on the top of her feet. Forced on to her face, ignominious position inviting to chastisement, she made one last frantic effort to throw them off, then, overpowered by sheer weight, glared sideways at them, an incarnation of impotent hatred. . . . Tibbie, breathing hard, with tears in her eyes, and an unfounded conviction that her nose was bleeding, stooped to pick up the rod.—“I shall give her six to begin with,” she announced, rolled up the sleeve of her dressing-gown, and began.

For all primitive beings the act of whipping has an uncanny fascination. To Clytie's four chastisers the first strokes of the birch were undiluted pleasure. Not exactly with cruelty, but rather with fascinated excitement, they heard the swishing rise and fall of the twigs, and saw the ever-increasing pattern of raised pink lines which it left upon Clytie's helpless body. After seven strokes, Tibbie paused.—“Will you beg Grace's pardon *now*?” she inquired with a touch of grim humour in her voice. . . . “Will you?”—she repeated, swinging up the rod again.

From the face hidden in the pillow came a sound which was intended for a contemptuous laugh. Clytie was beyond speech. It was not the pain *only*, but the ignominy—the awful exposure of her person. . . . In an agony of rage and shame she felt she would endure anything rather than give in to them, after this . . . but even as she made this vow, she heard a voice rising in a scream for mercy, and, with an indescribable wretchedness of soul, knew that this voice was hers.—Kathleen had seized the birch and was wielding it with an energy compared to which Tibbie's deliberate strokes were mere child's play. The pain was unbearable. Clytie's unhappy little hand made frantic efforts to break loose and protect herself; but it was held too tightly, and she burst into a flood of desolating tears.

“Stop, Kathleen—stop! It's too much—” shouted Jessy. She sprang forward, and catching the downward swoop of the birch on her arm, stamped with pain. “It hurts *frightfully*! It's—I never meant you to thrash her like that.—It's *brutal*!” she panted.

“Well,—she deserves it,” retorted Kathleen folding her arms with an affectation of bravado. “What's the good of doing it at all, and risking a fearful row, unless we do it properly?”

In an uneasy silence they gazed upon their victim, who had plunged under the clothes, and lay, shaking the bed with her convulsive sobs.

"There was blood—" said Grace in an awestruck voice. "*You* did that, Kathleen."

"Nonsense. . . . Besides there always is when boys are flogged ; my brother says so," said Tibbie. In a resolute voice she added—"It was for your own good we did it, Clytie MacLeod, and you jolly well deserved it . . . and if you want to tell Mlle. Victorine—you can.—That's all about it."

"*She* won't tell anybody," wailed Jessy, almost wringing her hands. At those words immense relief filled Grace ; but the others, influenced by Jessy's agitation began to feel both ashamed and sorry.

"I thought it was right before, and I think it now—" said Tibbie at last. "Go away to bed, Jessy. It's absurd to look like that when it was you planned the whole thing. You go too, Grace.—She won't break any more violins after this."

"You're not going to sleep here to-night, are you ?" murmured Jessy, who was remorsefully planning to steal back and comfort Clytie when all were gone.

"Of course we're going to sleep here ! Where else should we sleep ?" retorted Tibbie in a tone of irritated common sense. But it was in silence, and without meeting each others' eyes, that she and Kathleen took off their dressing-gowns and got into bed. As they were going to sleep they still heard, through the darkness, Clytie's strangled but unceasing sobbing.

7

The night wore through, until the approach of those chill grey hours about dawn, when vitality is at its lowest ebb ; when exhausted cries of agony herald the birth of a new life ; when the aged slip painlessly away into the beyond. Darkness and silence brooded over the house of Toussaint. Every blind was down, every bed filled with a recumbent form. Even the all-powerful head of Mlle. Victorine lay peacefully on its pillow, the annoyances and anger of the past day blotted out by a thick curtain of sleep.

The tick-tack of the clock on the top landing sounded loudly through the silent house. Presently with a little premonitory whirr, like the cough of an amateur about to make a speech, it struck the hour ; and, close on its heels, the great clock of Free St. George's sounded, solemnly, three times through the night. At the first stroke two thin bare feet slipped over the side of Clytie's bed. Shivering with cold and excitement, she

stood on the uncarpeted floor, and noiselessly drew her bolster into the hollow in which she had lain awake all through this dreadful night. In the half-darkness it looked like a murdered body in a sack; then, covered with the bedclothes, it uncannily assumed the shape of a sleeping figure. Stepping back to judge of the effect, she blundered against Tibbie's bed, who stirred in her sleep, muttered, and slept again,—Clytie meantime standing like the petrified sentinel of Pompeii. As soon as she dared to move, she gathered up her clothes from the chair, and, shoes in hand, stole with terrified precaution, a step at a time, out of the room.

Ominous shadows lurked at either end of the landing. The box-room door was half open, showing an interior of cimmerian gloom. Clytie was very much afraid of the dark. Murderers' ghosts and vampires played an unpleasant part in her night thoughts. At any other time it would have seemed impossible to go into that dreadful box-room, where your groping fingers might fall on a dead face, or an unseen hand shut the door, and leave you alone in the dark with *that thing!* between you and escape. But now she went straight in, and with desperate haste began dressing herself. Her old tweed coat hung on one of the pegs. With trembling hands she sought until she had found it; thrust her nightgown down behind a large box; and stole again into the passage. Her coat was over her arm. The touch of its good rough surface, its faint peaty smell, comforted her. She was glad she had never worn it here. It whispered to her of wet days on the moor. Her old blue bonnet was still stuffed into its pocket. . . . Oh for the breath of the night air on her face, for the concealing gloom of the railway carriage, for the sun rising to show her the hills closing in on every side. . . .

She was half-way down the first flight of stairs, when a despairing thought brought her to a full stop. Her purse! fool—fool that she was—she had forgotten her purse; and without money how could she buy her ticket? She wrung her hands; then, with a desperate resolution, turned, and retraced her steps to the bedroom where those others were asleep. The dressing-table stood exactly between their two beds, a dark silhouette against the grey square of the window . . . and, if she could see the dressing-table, either of them waking, would see her. . . . The drawer groaned as she pulled it open. A paper inside made a rustling noise. Hundreds of small unknown objects seemed to clink and rattle before she found her purse, hiding with that strange malignity of inanimate things, in the very back of the

drawer. The door of the room creaked horribly as she shut it behind her, seeming to cry out to the sleepers within to waken and rush forth and stop her. For a moment her straining ears seemed distinctly to hear the sound of voices—of matches being struck. Was that a door opening below? . . . Was somebody hurrying up the stairs? . . . If it was, she—she would spring at their throats and *strangle* them before they could give the alarm!

Holding her breath, and moving in a catlike crouching fashion, she crept down the stairs—past Mlle. Charlotte's door on the second landing—past the drawing-room flat where Mlle. Victorine slept—and across the hall, where the tiles sent a chill through her stockinged feet. One minute more and she would be out of the house. . . . But, even as she moved towards the front door, there was a movement from the Bibliothèque—a light shone in her eyes—and Mlle. Victorine appeared, candle in hand, upon the threshold!

At this awful moment, Clytie's limbs became paralysed with terror, and she was incapable alike of flight or attack. The hall table was beside her. She collapsed under it like a shot rabbit. . . . Tall and gaunt in a white wrapper, with two minute tails of black hair hanging over her shoulders, Mlle. Victorine advanced upon her. Her small piercing eyes seemed to look right through Clytie. The unhappy girl lay dumbly awaiting her fate.

Having reached the table, Mlle. Victorine paused. She still spoke no word, but her hands fumbled strangely among the pile of letters laid ready for the morning's post.—“Tiens!” she observed suddenly—“là voilà!” Then—miracle of miracles! with a letter in her hand she turned slowly away, and went up the stairs, her candle leaving a flickering trail of light behind her. . . . The light moved quickly up into the ceiling. Mlle. Victorine's door shut; and the house relapsed into darkness and silence again.

Ten seconds later the front door yielded to Clytie's trembling fingers, and a drizzle of rain blew into her face. All this time—ever since that awful apparition at the Bibliothèque door—she had been praying with an ecstasy of entreaty which might almost have roused pity in that sullen Baal who watched unmoved the gashings of his priests. Upon the wet step she breathed one last petition—“O blessed God—let it shut without a bang!” And behold! almost without a sound—the ten feet of polished mahogany slid back into its place.

From breakfast onwards there was always a pleasant bustle in the schoolhouse. In two's and three's the day girls kept arriving, and laughter and chatter came from the cloakroom where they changed into their house shoes. At nine all hurried to the salon, where Mlle. Charlotte performed the triple task of playing the harmonium, leading the singing of a French hymn, and detecting with unerring eye any late-comer.

This morning the sound of the shrill girlish voices did not give Mlle. Victorine her customary thrill of pleasure. Lying back on her pillow with closed eyes, she was fighting the early symptoms of one of her bad nervous headaches. In lieu of breakfast she had taken ten grains of aspirin, and was now impatiently awaiting the result. At eleven she intended to give her weekly lecture on French literature, to the first class. It was the lesson that she most enjoyed, and with contempt she had swept aside Mlle. Charlotte's proposal that she should give it instead. . . . "—Une dictée tu pourrais faire—là littérature—*non* ! . . . Certainly she would give her lesson as usual. Indeed, now that the house was still, the pupils being immured in their classrooms, the throbbing in her temples had begun to abate. A remedy marvellous that aspirin ! but a little reading would assist the cure. Of too autocratic an intelligence to be ashamed of reading a novel in the morning, she opened a new volume of Anatole France which for three weeks had been tantalising her want of leisure. Yesterday, but half-way through the second chapter, in had burst that fat tiresome Grace, with the tale of Clyté MacLawd's outburst. . . . A most difficult character that Clyté—stupid, sullen, impervious to kindness. One would wish to make every allowance for a girl who had not been to school before ; nevertheless it was a case for the utmost severity.

As if in response to her thoughts, in the upper part of the house voices began to call—"Clyté—Clyté—é—é—". Clouds of thunder gathered on Mlle. Victorine's brow. Impossible to throw off a headache if one was disturbed in this manner. . . . The calling rose to a shriller key. Mlle. Victorine leaped out of bed, rushed to the door, and called furiously into space—"Taisez-vous—taisez-vous donc !" A profound silence followed, and she returned to bed.

The book was deeply interesting. It absorbed her as completely as "Monte Cristo" used to do, in those almost forgotten days

of her Swiss home when she, a resolute girl of fourteen, read it hidden in the box bed, impervious to her mother's voice calling her to come and help in the kitchen. . . . The prudishness of the mere schoolmistress who divides literature into—"the nice," and the—"not suitable for the girls"—had never been Mlle. Victorine's. Literature was literature; the severe preservation of her pupils' minds in complete ignorance of what she trusted the future held for them, that was another affair. Passion and the "jeune fille" must clearly remain strangers to each other. For herself, if the school was her world, and surveillance her duty, literature was still her secret lover who stole into the room of her soul at every leisure hour. . . . With keen appreciation she was re-reading a scene which would have made the hair of her pupils' parents stand on end, when, with a gasp of irritation, she became aware that Mlle. Charlotte had entered the room, and was standing in a perturbed manner by her bed.

"—Victorine—I cannot find Clyté MacLawd!"

"What do you mean, Charlotte?—How dare you burst in on me like this?—when you know that I desire to remain tranquil!"

"But Victorine—listen I entreat of thee. It is serious. We cannot find Clyté MacLawd!"

"You cannot find Clyté MacLawd! That is a good reason, for example, to disturb me in this manner,—when you know very well she was forbidden to descend this morning. She has therefore remained in her room."

"But no—but no, she is *not* in her room! She is nowhere to be discovered. We have searched everywhere. She is not there. Victorine—she is not in the house!"

With flashing eyes, Mlle. Victorine flung herself into a sitting position.—"You are an imbecile, Charlotte. She is hiding from you!—She is in some cupboard—in the box-room for example—laughing at your absurd and futile attempts to discover her. She is quite capable of such a trick. Immediately you must find her, and bring her to me."

"But you will not understand then, Victorine?"—Mlle. Charlotte wrung her hands. "We have looked everywhere—but everywhere—even in the coal-cellar—before coming to thee."

"And why, I demand of you, did you not come to me on the instant—on the *instant*, when you discover she is not in her room?" . . . Mlle. Victorine's voice had risen an octave. . . . "Who is the head of this establishment—thou, or myself?"

"But my good Victorine—to disturb thee needlessly—with that headache——"

"My headache? Bah!—" Mlle. Victorine began furiously jerking her black silk stockings on to her lean brown legs. "And you dare to recount to me she is not in the house? What childishness! Have the goodness to hand me my peignoir. . . ."

Strange noises penetrated to the classroom where Mr. Pecker was giving his English lesson. Doors opened and shut. Furniture was shifted about. A commanding voice rang through the passages. With the furious energy of a *must* elephant, Mlle. Victorine was passing from flat to flat, followed by an abject and dusty group composed of Mlle. Charlotte, Fräulein and Louise, who grovelled under beds, moved every box in the cupboard, and even mounted chairs to look on the top of wardrobes, without venturing to tell her that they had searched in every conceivable place before. The classroom itself was not again raided, since even a person of Clytie's size and cunning could hardly conceal herself among the rows of desks which were its only furniture. Nobody therefore had any idea what was happening; but four guilty hearts were filled with dismal forebodings.

The opening of the door made them start and tremble. It was Louise. Regardless of the awful look cast her by Mr. Pecker, who was intolerant of interruption, she cried in a voice of hysterical excitement that Mlle. Teebbee was to descend to the Bibliothèque at once! With a sinking sensation in the pit of her stomach, Tibbie rose to her feet. Three pairs of imploring eyes followed her as she went from the room. Grace began to blink and sniff, and to fumble for her handkerchief. Kathleen kicked her savagely.—"Stop it you utter fool!" she muttered; "Tibbie won't let anything out." Mr. Pecker laid down his book with a sounding slap. "I fear my lecture disturbs your conversation," he observed. "I beg your pardon," mumbled Kathleen; and, after an awe-inspiring pause, the lesson went on.

Meantime Tibbie endured the ordeal of cross examination by Mlle. Victorine. . . . Was Clyté MacLawd asleep when Tibbie and Kathleen got up this morning? . . . Yes. She was asleep. . . . Was Tibbie certain that Clyté was actually in bed then? . . . "O oui elle était au lit tout droit." . . . "Spik Eenglish razere than such exécration French"—hissed Mlle. Victorine, whose countenance was beginning to resemble that of an infuriated tiger. Half an hour before, when Mlle. Charlotte had tremblingly suggested communicating with the police, Mlle. Victorine had very nearly slapped her face; but now, she was beginning to

realise that nothing else remained to be done. To postpone the evil hour, she went on questioning Tibbie, her eyes fixed upon her with harsh dislike, although, ordinarily, she was one of her favourites. Tibbie was growing sullen, for—since Mlle. Victorine had clearly no suspicion of what had really happened—she could not see why she should talk to her like this. Bluntly she admitted that Clytie had been crying when they came to bed last night. . . . No—she had not tried to console her. Mlle. had forbidden anybody to speak to her!

“Go from the room girl!”—cried Mlle. Victorine, beside herself with nervous irritation. “It is enough. I wish to hear no more. . . . Attendez donc!—Comment osez vous sortir comme ça quand je suis en train de parler? Vous êtes une fille grossière Teebee,—une fille grossière!” . . . After a pause, she added with sombre resolution—“Qu’on me cherche un cab à l’instant”.

And when Tibbie, thanking God for her wonderful escape, had sped on this errand, Mlle. Victorine’s angry sallow face drooped on to her clenched hands. For a minute she wept convulsively. . . . It was too clear—no longer could there be any doubt; Clyté MacLawd had run away. Before evening half the town would know of it, and other, inferior schools, would cackle exultantly at the news. . . . Yet it was not the scandal, nor even the inevitable damage to her prestige, which wrung from her those unaccustomed tears. . . . It was the shattering of an ideal—of that Paradise of happy ladylike girls—her dream school.

9

The short February afternoon was waning. The sun had crept down the heavens until now he was kissing the swelling bosom of the moor, at which all the world began to blush, and even the baby clouds in the eastern sky became a rosy pink. Along the horizon the wintry trees stood out like bronze tracery against the ever-deepening glow.

No human being was in sight. All around Clytie lay the moors, and far below her she heard the voice of the sea, lulling its little waves to sleep on the pillow of the Morvern coast. She stood motionless upon a hummock of heather, while the rays of the setting sun transformed her from the pitiable fleeing creature of the dawn, into a golden girl. Presently she sank down—for indeed after breasting the ridge her strength was nearly exhausted—and lay with her face buried in the withered heather, drawing in deep breaths of its peaty thymy fragrance.

As she lay there, neither awake nor asleep but drifting in some uncharted region between the two, it seemed to her that she was running with all her might across the hills to Standalone. But even running was too slow, so she drew a deep breath, and up she flew, right up among the stars, then a downward swoop, and on like a swallow, her bare feet rushing through the tree tops.—It was so wonderful, she almost screamed with joy.—Now she stood on the very top of Standalone roof, on the weathercock indeed. Looking down she saw that it was summer in the garden, and the roses were all in bloom,—red roses glowing like the sunset and lighting up the face of the sundial—white roses gleaming like pearls in the blue shadow cast by the house—yellow roses climbing madly up the walls to twine around her feet. . . . But no. She was not at Standalone yet, but only on the road to it, the road which ran past the Dripping Cave. Beside her was the sea, bluer than she had ever seen it before, and so clear that she could see the rocks and seaweed and the yellow sand at the bottom. She waded in, and the water rose upon her naked body, washing away every ache and pain. Without any effort and with amazing swiftness she shot along the surface of the water; threw out her arms, and sank down, down to the very bottom of the sea, and saw above her the silver bellies of the fishes swimming across the watery disc of the sun. . . .

A curlew screamed. Clytie raised her head with a start, and saw that it was all but dark. The sunset glow had faded; and, where it had been, clouds of livid grey were creeping up. As she rose stiffly from her bed of heather, she found that it was wringing wet. While she lay there the dew had been falling fast. The moon would not be up for two hours more, and she must strike for the road at once, before it grew too dark to find her way. It must be a good six miles to Standalone from here,—or seven say, because she was still a mile or more above the road. Seven more miles to go! Her heart sank within her. From head to foot she ached with weariness. Her feet were so blistered she could hardly stand on them. Her knees gave at every step. In the pale twilight the moor looked indescribably bleak and vast, and through the darkness rose the sound of the sea, no longer gentle and kindly, but weird and melancholy and full of a terrifying loneliness.

Was it three hours or three hundred years later, that she found herself staring, with the bewilderment of complete exhaustion, at the damp slates of a roof which stood out white against the grey hill-side. Beyond it were other masses, dark and square; and on her left hand a sloping wedge ran into the sea, and turned bright

silver where the rising and falling waves washed across it. The pier? Then—this was Standalone village? . . . She stood staring, with her lank sweat-drenched hair hanging like seaweed round her sunken face. . . . Could this be Standalone village? She asked herself again, in a dazed way. In answer a wave rolled up the shingle below the pier, broke into a thousand diamonds, and every moving pebble shouted "Standalone!" The mill stream tumbling joyfully down the brae, clapped hands with the clumsy mill-wheel, rolled it round and round in a rough caress, and raced on to his journey's end singing "Standalone! Standalone!"

Like one in a dream she passed on along the well-known road. Already the sleeping village was left behind. The shadow of the trees swallowed her up. The ground began to rise. In a minute more she would come to the top of the brae, and would see Standalone, her Standalone. She almost ran up the steep stony road; then, clasping her head in her hands, she shrank back into the shadow. What was *that*—that black figure standing with outstretched menacing arms by the side of her path? It held its ground. Grimly it waited for her to come out into the moonlight. . . . Was it—could it be only the old ash tree stump? Reason whispered to her that it was only that, and approaching nearer she saw that reason spoke true. Yet for a moment it had been no ash tree, but Mlle. Victorine herself. . . . It was a warning! They must have come by the other train, and caught the steamer, and got here before her while she was walking across the moors. . . . Perhaps they were lying in wait for her, even now, by the avenue gate. Scarcely knowing what she did, she flung herself over the stone dyke and fled through the boggy hollow. Her breath came in sobbing gasps. Her face was bedabbled with sweat. The night behind her seemed full of pursuing forms. She felt them closing in upon her as she floundered through the bog sinking to her ankles at every step. Their faces were wreathed with triumphant smiles. Their hands were stretched out to seize her, and strip her and flog her, here on her own earth, on the very threshold of Standalone. Even the sky above her was changed into a huge lowering face—the face of Mlle. Victorine.

The yew hedge rose black before her, a last obstacle between herself and safety. Flinging herself down on the ground, she struggled through a hole in it . . . and a hand laid hold of her foot as she did so! Like a rabbit with a weasel on its track, she fled across the garden—crushing the snowdrops in the border, tearing her stockings on the clinging rose bushes—and fell forward into the deep blue shadow of the house, clasping the ivy with both

hands. She was safe now—safe, safe, safe. Standalone would fall on them and crush them to powder, before it would let them take her.

When she opened her eyes again all the spectres of terror had vanished. The garden lay silent and beautiful. The leaves of the laurel bushes were all silver in the moonlight. Not a starling fluttered in the shrubbery. Not a dog barked. Standalone and she were alone together.

Through the shutters of the kitchen window a single warm ray stole out to mingle with the moonlight on the stones of the back court. The back door was locked. Gently but insistently she began knocking upon it. Somebody stirred within. "Let me in—let me in—" she called, through the keyhole. From the kitchen came the sound of a chair being shoved back, then feet running up the wooden stairs. Voices sounded above, but nobody came. "Let me in—let me in!"—she wailed, feeling as if her heart would break if they left her outside any longer.

Above her head a window was shoved up, and a wrinkled face peered cautiously out. A voice demanded—"Wha's there? Whatt are ye wantin' comin' disturrbin' folks at this time o' nicht?"

At the sound of that voice, so familiar in its harshness, so dearly loved, something clicked in Clytie's throat. Unable to speak she stepped back into the moonlight. A terrified—"Who are ye?" loosened her tongue.

"It's me, Nanna—don't be frightened"—she cried brokenly; "it's just me. . . . Open the door. I've come home again."

CHAPTER II

"ITHER FOLKS' WEANS ARE AN UNCO FASH"

"BUT this is impossible.—She cannot remain by herself at Standalone with only servants to look after her"—exclaimed Clytie's aunt.

The scene was the library at Brocksden, and the time that pleasant hour after tea when even the busiest country gentleman feels himself entitled to take his ease in his special arm-chair, and to relax his mind after the serious business of the day—his nesting pheasants, his young plantations, and the County Council meeting—by reading "The Times," which has just arrived by the second post. This the plain humorous-looking elderly gentleman who was sitting in front of the fire was very ready to do, if the lady reading a letter on the sofa would only leave him in peace to knit his bushy eyebrows over Mr. Chamberlain's speech, and tut! tut! irascibly because the railway servants were threatening to strike again.

"But this is beyond everything! . . . what next!" cried Lady Cecily, who had turned her page and come to something even more shocking.—"Good heavens, Peter! what is to be done about it?"

"Well well well—what's it all about now?" Sir Peter answered, without raising his eyes from the paper. "That tiresome brat again I suppose. If the Eastonburgh place won't have her back, why can't they send her to another school and have done with it?"

"But it was all settled my dear—an excellent school, kept by a Miss Purkis, somewhere in the south of England. Margaret Cameron arranged it all, and I thought she had been sent there a month ago.—And now, if you please, I hear that the whole thing has fallen through, because Clytie sent such a *dreadful* letter to the headmistress that she refuses to take her!"

Sir Peter threw down "The Times" with an irritable gesture. "Let me see that letter," he said, stretching out his hand for it. He had intended to stroll over before dinner to have a look at the new

wind-mill by the North farm, but he supposed he would have to give that up now. Frowning he glanced through the four pages of sloping old-fashioned writing, which ended "Yours sincerely, Margt. Cameron," and handed it back to his wife.

"It's perfectly clear what Miss Cameron expects us to do—she wants us to have her here."

"I never could consent to that Peter——"

"Well my dear—what alternative do you propose? You have already said she cannot be left at Standalone. Something has got to be done. Unfortunately we seem to be her only available relatives."

"I should have thought Margaret Cameron would offer to have her, when she is by way of being so devoted to Donald MacLeod," said Lady Cecily, an ancient enmity making itself, ever so subtly, apparent in her tone.

"Well—she doesn't mean to anyway. This letter makes that quite clear. And if she won't, I confess I don't see how we can avoid it." Sir Peter pursed his lips into a melancholy whistle. "I told you all along it would come to this," he added.

Lady Cecily's face had assumed an expression of gentle, inflexible obstinacy.

"I don't want to have the child here any more than you do. It's the last thing I wish I can assure you. But after all, she is your niece, and an orphan you know and all that—so, anyhow till that half-brother of hers can make some permanent arrangement, it seems to me we must offer to have her."

"Have you considered what it would mean, Peter?—to bring dear Johnnie into daily contact with a girl who has behaved in such a——"

"Pooh!" Sir Peter seemed to blow away this objection with contempt. "There's nothing in that, Cecily. Do him good to have a companion.—Make him more like other boys."

Lady Cecily's colour rose. The subject was a tender one. Intensely conventional herself, she adored her only child, yet secretly deplored his unlikeness to other people's boys. Even to his father, however, she was not prepared to admit it.

"I don't know what you mean, Peter," she said: then imprudently added—"I always thought you liked originality."

"Originality. H'm. There's certainly no lack of originality in him. . . . He's a queer chap. I can't make him out . . . doesn't care for riding . . . won't shoot——"

"I think Johnnie has a feeling against killing things——"

"Killing things? Never hit a thing in his life! Why, he

hasn't used that beautiful little gun I gave him, half a dozen times!" Sir Peter, who was an enthusiastic sportsman, sighed heavily. "It's sheer waste getting him things. No, no, he seems quite content to spend his time pedaling the old tricycle up and down the avenue with a barrow tied on behind. That's not a game for a boy of eleven, Cecily! I found him at it yesterday—hoing and puffing, and backing into the coach-house. I asked him what on earth he was doing, and why he didn't saddle his pony and go for a ride if he was out of a job. 'Aw I'm just pittin' the enjun inty the yarrd for the nicht' he told me—just like that. Extraordinary what a mimic the fellow is. If I'd shut my eyes I could have sworn it was old Jamie the guard. But it's bad you know, bad," added Sir Peter, the humorous twinkle of appreciation leaving his eyes. "He ought to be at school, Cecily—that's where he ought to be, and I never made such a mistake in my life as when I gave in to you about it."

Let it not be supposed that Sir Peter had been allowed to voice this prolonged criticism of his son and heir without various efforts at interposition on the part of Johnnie's mother, but as they were unsuccessful we have not troubled to repeat them. At this point however, anxious to head Sir Peter off the vexed question of Johnnie's schooling, Lady Cecily broke in with such insistence, that her husband was obliged to give her a hearing.

"Well Peter—and if he is a little eccentric, he takes it from your own father who—dear old gentleman that he was, and I always had the greatest respect for his cleverness as you know—still everybody admitted that he was most peculiar. And there is dear Johnnie the very image of him, cleverness and all. And that is the very reason why it is so specially important that he should not be thrown with anyone who might encourage——"

"He needs no encouragement," grunted Sir Peter. "He simply doesn't care what anybody thinks. All he wants is to be left alone to amuse himself. He gets his own way far too much. You give into him in everything. If it wasn't for Buchan——"

"Indeed my dear I do nothing of the sort! You know how particular I am in forbidding him to be with the servants. I can assure you, I never find the least difficulty in making Johnnie obey me. And he has such nice companions too, about the right age, and only two miles away, in the little Mappetts."

"And how often has he been at Langlea this year? Not thrice since Christmas. I can't blame him either. Fashionless little pink and white creatures without a temper among them.

Now what he needs is somebody who'll stand up to him—and from all I've heard of this Clytie, she'll be more than capable of holding her own."

Lady Cecily's gentle imperviousness to his reasoning invariably strengthened Sir Peter's previous conviction. He was now approaching that stage of the argument in which the coming of his niece to Brocksden—which a little before had appeared a regrettable and merely temporary necessity—was beginning to seem a highly desirable arrangement. His feelings underwent a palpable check, however, when Lady Cecily remarked—

"And if we did have her, even for a time, we should have to have a governess for her, Peter. Have you considered that? I could not possibly undertake such a responsibility unless we had a governess—German if possible—they are so much more dependable than Fren——"

"A German fiddlesticks!" exclaimed Sir Peter. "Nonsense my dear Cecily, Nonsense! Nonsense! A governess of any description is quite out of the question. We have no——" he was going to say "no room" but a consciousness of the rows of empty bedrooms above—made him end his sentence with an ironic—"a governess indeed!"

"Well, you know what a talk there was when the Browns had no governess for Gladys last year. I should not like to think people were saying such things of us——"

"If she comes here she must go into the schoolroom with Johnnie of course, and be taught by Buchan. Any other arrangement would be absurd. I don't suppose he would make any difficulty about it; probably be glad enough to make a little more money so easily."

"My dear Peter! Clytie must be nearly fifteen.—Now, I ask you, would it be suitable for a girl of that age to be taught by a young man?"

"Why not?"

"Why not? Er—simply because it is not done my dear. I never heard of such an arrangement. If he were a middle-aged man even, there would be still the question of her spare time and walks. Whereas a governess——"

"Once and for all I will not have a governess at Brocksden," Sir Peter raised his voice so that it completely drowned his wife's protesting treble. "A governess and a tutor at the same time! We had better set up a boarding-school while we are about it!"

... "Of course if you sweep aside every suggestion that I make—about my own niece—there seems no point in my dis-

cussing the matter," faltered Lady Cecily, and picking up her embroidery, she bent over it with a heightened colour.

Lest from the foregoing conversation the reader should begin to think that this is another of those sad cases of incompatibility of temperament which render a reform of the present marriage laws imperative, let me hasten to assure them that, in spite of—or possibly because of—their marked dissimilarity in mental equipment and tastes, Sir Peter and Lady Cecily had lived together for some three-and-twenty years in complete domestic felicity. During this period only three events had seriously disturbed the even current of their lives at Brocksden. The first was the news of the elopement of Lady Cecily's younger sister, Lady Alice MacLeod, with a Captain in her husband's regiment. The second, less shocking but more profoundly felt, was their disappointment that no child was born to them. The third was their flustered dismay when—after thirteen years of married life, during which time they had grown reconciled to their childless condition, it became apparent that Lady Cecily was to be a mother after all. When therefore it is realised that this threatened advent of an unknown and naughty girl was the most disturbing thing which had happened to them for a decade or more, it may be admitted that their discussion had followed very temperate lines.

Sir Peter was an affectionate and indulgent husband. Noting signs of distress upon his wife's face, he paused in his irritable pacing up and down the room, and, seating himself beside her on the sofa, soothingly patted her shoulder.

"Come now, Cissie my dear, you must not let it distress you. I shouldn't wonder if we got quite fond of her later on."

"I never did care for girls," said Lady Cecily.

"Oh it's an infernal nuisance—there's no doubt about that. But I don't see how we can help ourselves. And as for the other point—wait until Johnnie goes to Eton, and you can have a couple of governesses then if you like."

"Oh, but I hope she will have left us long before that," said poor Lady Cecily, adding with a sigh—"When I last saw Clytie she was—let me see—she must have been nine, so she can only be thirteen now. She was a very plain child then, very gawky and backward, with her father's hair—a MacLeod all over."

"H'm! it isn't exactly a bright prospect, but I'm afraid we shall have to make the best of it—" said Sir Peter; and fearful lest the discussion should be re-opened, he whistled to his retriever, and left the room.

Although the conversation recorded in the last chapter took place early in March, it was not until the evening of a fine day in April that the Wyse's family landau rolled sedately along the road from the station to Brocksden, with two small figures seated inside it, and its high box encumbered by a large trunk—on either side of which the footman's legs were extended in an attitude resembling what is known in circus programmes as "the scissors' contortion". It was Clytie's old nurse who had insisted upon this arrangement. "Miss MacLood's box wouldn't could possibly gang in a common fairm cairt," she had reiterated with immovable resolution. In vain did the English coachman inform her that he was not going to let a thing of that size on to his kerridge! Nanna fixed him with her small green eye, and up the trunk went.

"Why couldn't you let it go in the cart—" said Clytie peevishly, as Nanna, glowing with victory, got into the landau beside her.

"It disna do to let sairrvants get oot o' their place," responded the ancient servant with conviction.

Nanna was most anxious that Clytie should not be looked down upon in this new big hoose to which they were going. In her desire to increase the importance of her bairn, she had rifled the wardrobes of Standalone, and brought with her, packed in that same kist which she would not let out of her sight, sundry embroidered scarves and shawls which had attracted her eye by their brightness of colouring and evident worth, and the great-grandmother's pearl necklace, which had mysteriously remained in her keeping after Colonel MacLeod's death, instead of being sent to the bank with the other family jewels. Although those things as heirlooms belonged of right to Clytie's half-brother, Nanna allowed no paltry scruples to hinder her from purloining them. "Him as finds keeps," she told herself; and reflected with satisfaction that it would make the fine Englishy ledly's maid at Brocksden sit up when she saw that Miss MacLood o' Standalone had as bonny things o' her ain as Leddy-Gecily hersel'.

Nanna, who was "quite a character" as friends of the family were wont to remark, had maintained a grim discipline in other nurseries for more than thirty years before she came to Standalone. She was an Aberdeen woman, and a staunch Free Kirker, much given to quoting warning texts such as "Vengeance is mine. Ai will repay saith the Lorrd." When it came to the point however, she was generally found more than ready to take the Lord's prerogative into her own hands. She was in her element in a large family

where there might be a son at school, a young lady or so in the schoolroom, and four or five left over for the nursery, with whose upbringing their mother was generally too near the arrival of the new baby to have much energy to interfere. Not that Nanna was ever lacking in proper respect towards her mistress whatever their differences of opinion might be. She snorted scornfully at they new-fangled nurrses in uniforms! who wheeled their prams against the legs of the passers-by while they gazed entranced towards the shop windows; who thought it below their dignity to rise when their mistress entered the nursery, and tried to eliminate the word Ma'm from their vocabulary. Nanna always called her mistress Ma'm, and seldom forgot to prefix a Miss or Master to the names of her charges, even in the most poignant moments, such as when dragging a small figure—which despairingly caught at and was jerked away from knobs of drawers and legs of chairs—towards the cupboard where the tawse hung. " We'll sune see if ye didna mean o waken the baby, Miss Chrissie!" she would enunciate, and forthwith apply her tawse with unfailing energy to the tenderest portion of Miss Chrissie's person. Everything she did was thorough. There was no scamping or top dressing in her nursery. The morning toilet was a thing of horror, bony hands scrubbing soap into your eyes and mouth, hair exhaustively brushed and combed and twisted into countless ringlets with a prompt application of the back of the brush if you attempted to wriggle away; frocks starched to point of unbearable prickliness; shoes polished so that you could see your tearful face in them, and awful vengeance awaiting you if you rumbled your immaculate cleanliness before being led forth for your daily walk.

When Nanna found herself at Standalone with the tiny Clytie as her only charge, she grew quite worried at having so little work; and when eighteen months had passed, and there was no word of a new baby, she meditated giving notice in order to seek what ministers call—a wider sphere of duty. But fate decreed otherwise. The flight of Clytie's unhappy mother fixed Nanna irrevocably at Standalone. Since others had forgotten their duty to the bairn it wasna' for her to do so, she resolved, and concentrated her powers upon eliminating possibly inherited traits of immorality in the small creature committed to her charge. Certainly for the first few years of her life Clytie was as weel brocht up a bairn as you could meet anywhere. The old aunt who had come to keep house for her deserted nephew, was wont to remark it was " reelly gratifying how quiet and obedient dear baby was.—Ai hardly ever need to scold her, and as for whipping her, Ai'm sure nurrses would never

think to do such a thing."—To this a lady who happened to be staying in the house, and whose room was directly under the nursery, replied that she had noticed that whenever the nurse *clapped her hands*, little Clytie at once began to cry. This enigmatic remark puzzled Aunt Betsy, who was the simplest and least suspicious of old ladies; but unable to make anything of it, she mildly remarked that it was indeed a curious coincidence.

Age however has a mellowing effect, and by the time that the grass was growing again on Clytie's father's grave, the wilful black-eyed orphan had taken possession of Nanna's heart. As the other servants put it—she had got browndened on the bairn—and her trusty tawse, hanging neglected on its nail, might well have complained "Othello's occupation's gone". The only point upon which Nanna's discipline remained before was with regard to keeping the Lorr'd's day. Sunday was associated in Clytie's mind with best clothes and sour looks, and with the vague terror which chilled her as she learnt Nanna's favourite text—The eye that mocketh at his father and despiseth to obey his mother, the ravens of the valley shall pick it out and the young eagles shall eat it. The novelty of driving to church in the old brougham with its strong smell of Russian leather, and of sitting in the big pew overlooking the rest of the church, soon palled; while the brutality of there being a second set of prayers and psalms after the sermon made her sit with a face like a thundercloud, obstinately refusing to take hold of the psalter which Aunt Betsy coaxingly held towards her. . . . Yet even Sundays were not wholly unpleasant. There were alleviations in the shape of an egg to breakfast, and a haggis or sheep's head pie for dinner. Also, it was pleasant to reflect as she went to bed that having done exactly what God wanted all that day, she was now at liberty to please herself for the rest of the week.

Only those who have lived in the country as children themselves, can realise the almost perfect happiness of Clytie's solitary childhood at Standalone. The first thing that she could remember was wandering along by the sea, her petticoat full of mussels which she intended to cook and eat; and of coming upon a small round pool with pink rocks sloping down to a bottom of yellow sand, and red water anemones, and purple floating seaweed. The joy of this discovery made her let go of her skirt and clasp her hands; then with anguish she realised that her precious mussels were falling in a series of soft splashes into the water. . . . After this it was in vain that Nanna bade her "play in the garden and see and not go out of sight of the window". That other world which lay beyond the yew hedge and the avenue, called aloud to be discovered. The burn

which ran through the cow's paddock could be followed up through the Standalone wood until you came out on a vast mysterious moor, which stretched away to the very edge of the world. There was a fresh-water tarn up there, where the wild duck made their nests in May, small mattresses of straw laid on the farthest out branches of the fallen willow tree, with deep black mud to prevent you from getting to the greeny-blue eggs. The wild thyme grew everywhere, filling the air with its sweetness. Clytie liked to rub it between her fingers and hold it to her nose. . . . And oh, the wonders of the shore in all its changing moods; low tide when you could wade out to the little island, your feet slithering over the broad sticky sea garters, sea tangle twining round your ankles, sea grapes bursting when you set your naked heel on them; high tide when all your daily play nooks were covered up, and the water below the bathing rocks looked ominously deep and green; October gales, when the familiar face of the Sound grew strange and angry, and the roaring waves rushed farther and farther up the beach, surrounding the boathouse, sweeping away the sea pinks, and depositing a line of salt and seaweed, and bits of cork and wood along the edge of the grass.

On the evening of such a day, when window-panes rattled violently as though somebody outside were trying to get in, Clytie would seek the company of Nanna and Kirstie in the kitchen, feeling Aunt Betsy was too old to be an adequate protection. Kirstie had tales galore of kelpies and the gude folk; but the ones she liked best to tell were of strange happenings, second sight and the like. There was the tale of the unknown washerwoman who, when the moon was full, could be seen washing a bloody clout in the burn; and of the widow woman in Skye who laid new sheets on her bed, but, feeling them thrice twitched from under her, put them back in the kist knowing they must be needed for some other purpose. . . . "And sure enough, Miss Clytie"—Kirstie's voice would drop to a mysterious sing-song,—“not two weeks were gone afore they carried in her ae son drooned, and those very sheets were used for the streaking.” Clytie would listen, with her arms leaning on the kitchen table, and her face growing whiter and whiter, and a curious pricking sensation running over her skin. There was a dreadful joy in listening to Kirstie's stories; but Aye me! it was anything but joy to go up the dark stairs to bed after them. Sometimes she was too much afraid to go to sleep, and as she lay trembling with fear in the darkness, and longing for Nanna to have finished her supper and come upstairs again, Clytie would fervently resolve never to let Kirstie tell her a ghost story again.

Yet the very next stormy evening would find her begging for another, and listening with the same fascinated terror.

Clytie had no desire for other children to play with. She only wanted to be left alone to wander about the moors and along the shore, dreaming, dreaming, dreaming, until the sound of the sea, and the wind in the heather, and the burn singing down the hill-side, blended together in her ears in a wild and lovely music. When the little Macphersons came over from Nochdrinn to spend the day with her, she was excited rather than happy. Having shown them the best gooseberry bushes in the garden, defended them from the Bubbley Jock who invariably attacked strangers, and shown off before them by clearing the rushing mill lade at a bound, she would begin to weary of hospitable effort; and would sometimes leave them to amuse themselves, and steal away down to the sea, conscious of a great relief in being alone again. The little Macphersons never resented this odd behaviour. Shy wild children themselves, Clytie's aloofness seemed to them perfectly natural. "Well—mye-dears, and where's Clytie?" Aunt Betsy would inquire in her kindly sing-song voice when they came awkwardly into the dining-room for their tea. "I think she's just coming Miss MacLeod," they would answer.

It may be imagined that when, about Clytie's eleventh year, a series of young ladies, each of whom was known by the generic term "The Governess," began to languish for periods of varying shortness at Standalone, they had anything but an easy time of it. In the guerilla warfare which ensued Clytie had one powerful ally in the shape of Nanna, who, while theoretically convinced of the necessity of having a governess, was ever unfavourably impressed by the governess of the hour. Aye—but it was war to the knife between Nanna and the governesses!—"A'm thinkin' the air here isna suiting ye verra weel Miss. You're no lookin' the thing at a'"—thus deferentially and with an appearance of sympathy would she open the campaign. The flank movement consisted of ominous hints thrown out to the anxious and undecided Aunt Betsy. "A daresay it's a' for the best, but it seems a queer thing M'am for us to be leavin' Miss Clytie sae muckle t' the maircy o' yon governess, and us never set een on her until she cam here. . . . Ou aye—she's plesant enouch when ither folks is by . . . m' phm . . . but A gaed inty the schuleroom the morn', tae see t' the fire, an' gin she hadna Miss Clytie's twa wrusts twisted in her haunds—ye can see the marks yet! But dootless she was pit aboot wi' something. . . ." The final routing charge was made with a grimly

humorous countenance and a frankness of speech peculiarly disconcerting to young ladies who always made a point of keeping servants in their place.—“The bairn’s a gude eneuch bairn, and me and her Ant MacLeod never had ony tribble wi’ her afore *ither folk* came, wantin’ her tae luirn a lesson here and play the pianny there, when it’s agin a’ reason and common-sense tae keep her ben the hoose in this fine weather. Sma wunner the puir thing canna pit up wi’t! Ye must excuse me for mentioning it Miss Smuth, but ye’ve taken the wrang way wi’ her athegither. Ye’ll never drive *her* agin her wull. She has a great strength o’ purpose for her years.”

“But mye-dear mye-dear, what is to become of you if you’re such a naughty girl that no governess will stay with you?” Aunt Betsy would tearfully inquire. To this riddle Clytie had her own solution. Mr. Grant, the parish schoolmaster, could come up and teach her three afternoons a week; the rest of the time she could perfectly well do her lessons by herself. She considered this an ideal plan, and by sheer ardour of suggestion she might in the end have persuaded Miss MacLeod (who had been much agitated by a remark of the last departing governess that her niece was only fit for a reformatory) to think the same. But fate had decreed otherwise, and Clytie was not destined to grow up at Standalone as ignorant, wayward and happy a maid as ever trod beyond the paths of men. Miss MacLeod, who had of late been failing rapidly, was discovered to be suffering from a malady which necessitated an immediate operation. By the joint efforts and persuasion of the country doctor and Mrs. Macpherson she was removed to a nursing home in Glasgow, where she died soon after.

At this lamentable juncture, Mrs. Macpherson, being an energetic and sensible woman, cabled to Clytie’s half-brother and guardian, who was a Civil Servant in India. An answer came, “Send her to school”—and it was forthwith arranged that Clytie should become a pupil of the Mlle. Toussaints’. Mrs. Macpherson herself escorted her to Eastonburgh: and the rest we know.

3

But while I have been leading you back to those early days at Standalone, the Wyse’s landau has passed through the little town of Lammerton, and is rolling along the Coldburn road until it must have almost come to the Brocksden gates.

Nanna straightened her rusty black bonnet, and smoothed back her grey hair. “Wet your hanky and rub your face, Clytie—it’s

as black as a sweep's," she commanded. "An' fasten up your jalkit. Di—di—di—your hair's like rats' tails an never a bit o' gloss upon it. It was a fine piece o' wurrk sendin' ye to yon schule where it never got a good brush frae one week's end to anither." Stretching out her hand, which was covered with a black cotton glove, she tweaked Clytie's straying locks into position.

"Let me be, Nanna!" Clytie pettishly wriggled away. "I don't care what I look like, and my new jacket's too tight. It won't button——"

"An' what for did ye no tell me that when we was in the shop?" shrilled Nanna in great concern, for they had purchased the jacket only that morning, in Oban.

To this Clytie vouchsafed no answer. She sat huddled up in the corner, her eyes almost closed, resolved not even to glance at the alien beauty of this country of farms and gentlemen's houses and beech woods; her scowling face a mirror for the bitterness of her soul. . . . It was not simply that she had been outmanœuvred and outfought, forced into ignominious surrender, and was even now on her way to exile. There was something much worse than this—something so awful that her eyes smarted with tears when she thought of it.—*Standalone was let!* Rich people from London had taken it. *English* children would play by her burn, and explore her cave, and go walks with their governess along 'her shore. Before the month was out, the interlopers would arrive.—If by raising her finger Clytie could have prevented her half-brother who had done this deed from burning in hell for ever, she would not have raised it!

The carriage had passed through a handsome gateway, and in spite of herself Clytie caught a glimpse of a river running along beside the avenue, its banks blue with wild hyacinths. It was presently left behind, and they went rolling through a trim park dotted with clumps of rhododendrons.

"Eh! but this is a grand place—a gentleman's place this," ejaculated Nanna, who was peering through the window. Alarmed at the expression upon her young companion's face, she hastened to add—"No that I wud compare it to *Standalone* for a meenut. Ye munna think that ma bairn. There's nae place comes up tae *Standalone* for you 'n me. But that mustna blind us tae the merits o' ither places. This is a bonny place too, in its way. An' when all's said and done it's your ain antie we're goin' to."

"I *won't* call her that. Aunt Betsy was my Auntie—nobody else."

"M'phm . . . Aye. . . . But your puir Ant Betsy's gone now,

whilk was only t' be expectit, an' her seventy-nine if she'd lived to see the New Year. It wad be a queer way o' showing your respect for the auld anty tae be castin' oot wi' the new, forbye that her Laddyship's your ain mither's sister, an' nearer o' kin to ye than your Ant Betsy ever was."

To this undeniable truth Clytie was about to return a violent answer, when a bend of the drive, disclosing to them a terribly grand-looking house not fifty yards away, threw them both into a state of agitation.

"We're a' but there. . . . Noo Miss Clytie—ye'll see and say howdydo prettily, for there's naething like makkin' a gude impression at the start. And ye'll be weel advised tae mak up t' the young gentleman, your kissin. That'll please your anty mair than onything else——"

The grinding of the wheels upon the gravel put a stop to further precepts. The carriage stopped in front of a wide flight of shallow steps, and the door immediately opening disgorged a butler and footman. Behind them in the shadow of the hall lurked a small sandy-haired boy, who, after a moment's hesitation, came slowly down to the carriage.

"How are you? Your train must have been awful late surely? You should have been here an hour ago," said he, speaking very loud in his embarrassment. As for Clytie, she was paralysed with shyness, and for a trying interval they stood facing each other on the gravel without shaking hands or meeting each other's eyes. Nanna came to the rescue. "Go ben wi' the young gentleman, Miss MacLood. Ai will see to the luggage," she said in her genteel and most English voice.

"You ran away from school—didn't you?" remarked Johnnie Wyse as he led Clytie through the hall.

Clytie grew rather red, and mumbled "Yes".

"If I wanted to run away—" said Johnnie, "d'you know what I'd do? I'd dress up as a stoker, and go on an engine. They'd never think of looking for me there, would they?"

There was no time to develop further this original idea, for a door at the top of the stairs opened, and a splendidly dressed lady appeared.

"That's Muddie," remarked Johnnie.

Clytie reluctantly permitted herself to be kissed.

"Well dear, so here you are. You must be quite tired after your long journey all the way from Oban. Travelling is such a tiring thing!"

Poor Lady Cecily was endeavouring to express a welcome in

her tone which, indeed, she was far from feeling. Even in the half-light of the passage she could not but notice that Clytie was a very odd-looking girl, and not in the least pretty. Distressfully her eye roamed over the short lean figure, the scanty red locks, and ill-cut frock. Then, with a perceptible start, she became aware of a black bonnet above a yellow face, nodding respectfully in the background.

"Miss MacLood's nurse, mye Lady," explained Nanna with ready tact.

"Her nurse? O—er—yes, your old nurse. Of course—I remember. I hope you had a good journey nurse."

"Thank-you mye Lady. It's verra gude o' you I'm sure to have us here, and what a lovely place it is too:" thus Nanna in her most insinuating manner. Coming a step nearer, and lowering her voice, she added—"Miss Clytie, puir bairn, is just a wee fatigued like wi' the train; but she's been *that* excited a' day at the thocht o' meetin' her kissin!"

This diplomatic and imaginative flight was rewarded by a perceptible thawing in Lady Cecily's manner. She took Clytie by the hand, and led her into the biggest and finest room Clytie had ever seen, with pictures in gold frames on the walls, and little tables everywhere all covered with silver and china and vases of flowers, so that she felt afraid to move lest she knocked one of them over.

Somebody was reading by the window. As they entered he laid down his book, and rose.

"Oh—er Mr. Buchan—this is my little niece, Clytie."

With a confused idea that she was being presented to her uncle—and quite resolved not to be kissed again—Clytie held out a stiff hand.

"This is Mr. Buchan, Clytie, who is so kind as to consent to teach you as well as your cousin Johnnie, until we can find a governess for you—" said Lady Cecily, who had given this explanation so often to the neighbouring ladies that she had begun to believe it herself.

At the hated word governess Clytie's thin brown face, which had hitherto been expressionless with shyness, flushed to a deep red. She glanced obliquely at her aunt, then, with an effort looked at this person who was kindly going to teach her. He was an ugly man, she thought—an ugly unpleasant man, who was laughing at her inside himself. He knew all about everything, and why she was here. Probably he was only going to teach her because he was made to. Nobody really wanted her here—not

even that boy, for he had vanished when they came into the drawing-room. Sitting down on the edge of the nearest chair, and feeling numbed with shyness and misery, she stared straight in front of her with a wooden countenance.

The situation, with its surface appearance of three persons sitting in a perfectly normal manner before a drawing-room fire, and the undercurrent of rebellion—letters and anger—reluctance and defeat—which had swept them together, was embarrassing enough to at least two of them—for Mr. Buchan was as yet only an amused onlooker. Lady Cecily begged Mr. Buchan to be so kind as to ring for the lamp.

Mr. Buchan did so.

"And yet perhaps it is hardly worth while to have the lamps," observed Lady Cecily, "as we are dining out, and you will probably not be sitting here.—Ah but here they come. Well perhaps it is as well to have them, as it is such a gloomy evening."

When the lamps had been placed on various tables, and one had been sent away because it smelt of oil, there was a pause, which was broken by Lady Cecily placidly remarking—

"And so Standalone is let at last—on a five years' lease I hear. Such a sensible arrangement."

With a sudden fierce movement Clytie turned her face away from the lamplight, and the tutor, waking from the dreamy abstraction into which Lady Cecily's conversation invariably lulled him, saw by the red glow of the fire that the tears were running down the queer ugly little girl's cheeks.

4

Like most schoolrooms in those pre-Montessori times, the school-room at Brocksden contained a mixture of things which had remained there since Johnnie's nursery days, and others which Lady Cecily had decided to be no longer good enough for the grown-up part of the house. So the large prints of Landseer's "War and Peace" which used to be in the dining-room now hung on either side of the fireplace, with "Cherry Ripe" between them, and the high nursery guard below. The mahogany bookcase where the lesson books lived, was topped by a coloured photogravure called "Give me some too," and an oil portrait of Sir Peter by a local artist. Behind the rather uncompromising sofa,—originally in Sir Peter's mother's boudoir—stood a dappled tailless rocking-horse which Johnnie still preferred to his real pony. With its turret window overlooking the terrace, and its square window above the porch, it

was the most pleasant room imaginable; yet it often seemed to Johnnie Wyse the dreariest spot on earth, especially on a fine spring morning when he found himself confined to its four walls and compelled to work there for interminable hours under his tutor's eye. The sunshine streamed in through the window. It was a perfectly ripping day, now; but, reflected he gloomily, it would as likely as not rain in the afternoon, and if it did Muddie would be sure to say it would make his cold worse if he went out and got wet. On the mantelpiece behind him the schoolroom clock tick-tacked with irritating deliberation. Johnnie was longing to look round and see what time it was, but he did not dare to do so because, the last time, Mr. Buchan had said in a very unpleasant voice—"If you look at that clock again you'll see what will happen!"

Sourly he cocked his eye in the direction of his cousin Clytie. She was sitting at the small table in the turret, an enviable situation, for not only could she look out through the window as much as she liked, but also Mr. Buchan had his back to her. She was supposed to be preparing her lessons for to-morrow. Johnnie knew better than that! Not once all the times he had looked at her had he seen her turn the page. She was simply enjoying herself, while he who was far younger was kept hard at it over this beastly Latin.

A large bee buzzed in through the open window, realised at once that it had made a mistake,—tried to get out again, banged against the glass, and began flying in agitated circles round the room. Johnnie dropped his book and rose jerkily to his feet.

"Sit down man!" growled a curt voice.

Johnnie subsided into his seat, but his face was anxious and he ducked in terror each time the swooping bee passed him.

"It won't hurt you. It's only a bumble bee."

"They sting worse than any. James says two of them can kill a horse," murmured Johnnie.

"Bunkum! You're thinking of a hornet. . . . There—it's out now. Go on."

Clytie's eyes followed the flight of the bee across the daffodil border and the terrace, and away over the park. She wished she was a bee too. Would not she fly away, this very minute, out through the window and away from this grand stiff house, where she could neither sit walk eat nor speak without Aunt Cecily wanting her to do it in a different way.

In spite of the consistent kindness with which she was treated, Clytie knew very well that she was not here because they really

wanted to have her, but simply because there was nowhere else for her to go. To her sensitive and proudly egoistic soul, this knowledge in itself was intolerable. Resolved not to like Brocksden, she obstinately blinded her eyes to its quiet lowland joys of river, wood and field; spent much of her time sitting in the room where Nanna was engaged in lengthening all her frocks—Aunt Cecily had been quite shocked at their shortness—and was consequently thoroughly bored and depressed. Her lesson hours, although not very long, were a weariness to her flesh. True she had hitherto managed to remain on formally polite terms with her cousin's tutor . . . but this sort of thing never lasted. Her experience of the governesses had taught her that. For the first week or so they were always pleasant enough, full of—please and thank you's—and gentle hints rather than commands. But after the first row it was all different—dry domineering voices, cold or flashing eyes. And it would be just the same with the tutor.

Johnnie's drawling voice unenthusiastically construing his Cæsar, and the short barking comments of Mr. Buchan who was getting cross with him, formed an accompaniment in a minor key to Clytie's wandering thoughts. She was telling herself that she would soon run away again, and live in a cave right away in the middle of the moor, where none of them would ever think of looking for her. Nanna would come too of course, to cook their food, and there would be heather all round, and the burn to bathe in; and they would keep hens and bees and a cow, so as to have honey and eggs, and cream with their porridge. The sullen listlessness of Clytie's expression gradually turned into a dreamy contentment. Leaning her head on her hands she planned it all out, and for ten minutes was completely happy.

Then, with an uneasy consciousness that she was not alone, she looked up, and found Mr. Buchan standing beside her.

"Done all your work already? That's good—" said he, and though his voice was quite ordinary, there was a sarcastic expression in his eyes. Sitting down on the edge of the table, he picked up her exercise book and began turning the pages.

"Show me where you've worked out that problem. I can't find it."

"I—er—it was so queer and difficult. . . . I didn't. . . ."

He looked at her, and her voice stammered into an ignominious silence.

"So you simply didn't try to do it?"

"Mr. Buchan—it seemed to me just nonsense—no meaning in it at all," murmured Clytie, avoiding his eye and her face rather red.

To her relief an interruption came from Johnnie, who had put away his books and was now swinging the door to and fro and breathing heavily in order to attract attention.

"Away you go, Johnnie. I've done with you," said Mr. Buchan, with a slight stress upon the "you" which did not escape Clytie's notice.

"I'm waiting for Clytie, Sir. I want her to come and help me with the new dam I'm making in the burn. I can't get the bricks to sit right without somebody else to stand on them while I dub down the mud round them y' know. . . . It's past twelve——"

"You'll have to dam by yourself this morning, Johnnie. I'm sorry—but run along."

Johnnie vanished (how, from being the most disobedient boy in Lothianshire, Mr. Buchan had in ten months' time made him a model of prompt obedience, was the marvel of the entire household!). But Clytie rose slowly to her feet. This was the first time that Johnnie had, of his own accord, asked her to play with him, and it seemed to her that Mr. Buchan was deliberately trying to prevent her from becoming friends with her cousin. Her voice trembled with resentment as she said—"If it's past twelve then I can go too".

"Why?" asked Mr. Buchan looking steadily at her.

"Because my lessons are always finished at twelve. Aunt Cecily——"

"Your lessons are finished when you have done three hours' work."

"I've done my three hours——"

"You haven't. You haven't done five minutes of honest work since you came into this window. That was pretty stupid of you, because of course you've got to do it now instead of going out—and it's a ripping day." He too glanced regretfully through the window at the daffodils in the sunshine. "However—we'll tackle this problem first. The rest you can do by yourself."

He picked up the book and read the third problem in Euclid through in an undertone. "It's ludicrously simple"—was his comment. "You can do it in three minutes if you give your mind to it;" and he began expounding it very slowly and clearly. . . . "Do you understand? Now fire ahead. Work it out for yourself." But Clytie did not take the pencil which he held out to her. Was she, the tamer of many governesses, to crumple up now simply because Mr. Buchan was a man? Perish the thought!

"I can't. I don't understand what it means."

"O come!—You're not so stupid as that, surely?"

Clytie said nothing, but sat with rising colour, the ears of her mind resolutely closed, while Mr. Buchan explained the problem for the second time. He was getting angry too, and when, at his expectant pause, Clytie answered—opening her lips just sufficiently to let the words through—"Don't understand one word you're saying"—he rose abruptly to his feet, and dragged forward the blackboard with an angry clatter.

"Turn your back on the window. No—come and sit at this table. Now be so good as to listen this time. . . . Where's the chalk? Didn't I say it was always to be put back? Who had it last?"

"I don't know."

"Get up and look for it then. . . . Oh—er—never mind"—for he had found it in his breeches' pocket. "Now—do you see this mark. What is it?"

"Don't know."

"It's one—humber one. And one and one make two. Do you understand that? . . . Now can you tell me what twice two make?—Four did you say?" (Clytie had not spoken.) "Capital. And thrice two makes——? Don't trouble to answer my questions if it's too much effort."

Clytie looked at him with hatred in her eyes.

"Six. That's what it makes.—Have you ever rung up anyone on the telephone?"

"No."

"If you had you'd know that the first point is to get into communication with the person at the other end. That's what I'm trying to do now. To get into communication with your brain."

His rather boyish sarcasm flicked Clytie like a lash. There was no longer any difficulty in not understanding the problem which he had begun to work out once again in bold white lines upon the blackboard. Her head was singing with rage.

The clock struck the half-hour.

Mr. Buchan's hand shot up and rubbed out all that he had written. Not a line remained.

"Come here"—he said curtly. "Take the chalk. . . . Now—do it yourself"

He strode away to the other side of the room, and with a deep breath flung himself down on the sofa. Clytie was left standing alone by the blackboard. Had he stayed beside her, she would probably have obeyed him, because—although she would not have admitted it even to herself—she was afraid of him. But a Mr. Buchan standing over her, and a Mr. Buchan at the other end of

LOVE IN A MIST

the room, were very different matters. She snapped the chalk in two, and flung it on the floor.

"Pick that up at once."

"I won't."

There was a silence like the breathless expectant pause in Eastern climes before the bursting of a duststorm.

"All right"—said Mr. Buchan at last, and his tone was ominously calm. "I shall go away then and leave you locked in here until you've done it. I'm not going to waste any more of my valuable time—*Damn!*"

For Clytie had bounded across the room to the door and was already through it and fumbling with the key which, luckily for her, was on the outside. She succeeded in turning it half a second before the handle was seized and wrenched with a vehemence which made the panels creak and bend. A sounding kick followed. . . . It was an exquisite moment! Nothing so good as this had ever happened with the governesses. Clytie's feelings found vent in a shriek of joy. With an effort controlling her voice, she pompously announced through the keyhole: "I shall go away now and leave you locked in here. I am not going to waste any more of my valuable time upon you." Then, afraid lest the door should burst open from the violence of the attack within, she ran away shaking with laughter.

5

Quite apart from the durance vile which he now suffered, locked up in his own schoolroom upon this May morning, Mr. Buchan the tutor was, at the time of our story, regarded as a very unfortunate young man by his family and friends. Certainly a year earlier when he was flushed with triumph over his unexpected First at Cambridge the idea never entered his head that, not many months later, he would be earning less than a hundred a year as tutor to a small boy in the country.

His father had been in the Indian Civil Service; and, ever since he could remember, his mother had impressed upon him that this also was to be his happy fate. Many were the stories which she told him of her brief married life in India,—an enchanted India of palm trees and sunshine and regimental dances; a place where every child had a pony, where Rajahs sent you trays of fruit and sweets; where salaaming servants did everything you wanted, and never gave notice. This was how she remembered India, looking back through the years of meagre widowhood, which she had spent

in a semi-detached villa almost as much above her means as it was below her station.

The two little boys, Charles and Gavin, although thrilled by the idea of children having ponies of their own, did not much care to hear about the dances and servants. They demanded stories of tigers and earthquakes, of fighting mutineers and riding on camels; and she indulged their fancy as far as a good memory but a limited imagination would carry her. In all good faith she told them that their father would have been a Lieutenant-Governor and ridden on an elephant or in a carriage drawn by eight fierce camels, if only he had not died when he was still quite young.—“*Why* did he die, Mummy?” Gavin used to ask in despair at having lost such wonderful opportunities: and she answered that it was in the summer-time when all the mothers had to take their children to the hills because it was cooler there: so father was left quite alone in the heat. And it was so hot, and a dreadful illness called cholera came to the city. And father worked so very hard helping the people, telling them not to be frightened, making them disinfect their houses, that he got very tired. And mother kept writing and begging him to come up to the hills and have a rest, but he said he couldn’t until the cholera stopped. So one night he got it himself, and died quite quickly, so that mother had not even time to come down to him. Then mother and Charles and little baby Gavin were left all alone, and had to come back to England. But when Gavin was a bigger boy, if he worked very hard at his lessons and was very good, some day he too would go out to India in a big ship, and be a Lieutenant-Governor instead of father. . . . “And I’ll go to Injia too and fight lots of battles there, and have elephants to pull my cannons”—observed Charles, who saw no reason why he should not be in the happy ending to the story as well as Gavin.

Gavin did not find it easy to be a very good boy in those early days, as he had a violent temper, and was indeed for a time known in the neighbourhood as that little boy who bites other children. But at the cramming preparatory to which he presently went he certainly learnt to work very hard indeed, and there was jubilation in the small house, and extravagant festivities in the shape of chicken and jelly for dinner, when the news came that Gavin had taken a scholarship at Eton. The next six years were not so happy as he had been led to expect. Gavin enjoyed football, but hated cricket, and he could not become a wet bob as he longed to do, because it cost too much. Every other boy in college seemed to have better clothes and more pocket-money than he had; and

even in that community of Tugs none worked harder. He was always second in his class and always trying to be first. Even in his holidays he had to work one or two hours a day; and twice he spent the Spring holidays with a family at Tours learning French, so as to win the Prince Consort's prize, which he failed to do, coming out second as usual. Meantime Charles was having glorious holidays, staying with their uncle in Cumberland, and learning to shoot!

"I should like to have proper holidays, like Charles does," Gavin said wistfully to his mother; and she told him—so he should when he had passed his I.C.S. exam.—a whole extra year at Cambridge with nothing to do but learn Hindustani and enjoy himself.

"But that's such a long way off and such lots of things to try for—the scholarship at King's, mugging for the Trip., and then the awful cram for the I.C.S. It makes me tired to think of it."

"Then don't think of it! All you've got to think of now is the scholarship at King's. Just think how splendid to be a scholar at father's own college. How proud he would have been!" said Mrs. Buchan in a tone at once bracing and affectionate.

But when in spite of that holiday work (or possibly because of it) Gavin failed to get more than an exhibition, his mother wept and folded him in her arms, vowing that it did not matter—everybody must have their failures now and then—she would get the trustees to let her sell out some stock, and he should go to King's just the same. And when three years later his name appeared near the top of the Honours list, she wept again, and cried—"I told you so".

That year of holidays, and India, had seemed very near then. There was little doubt he could pass the examination; but to make assurance doubly sure he was to work for three months at a celebrated crammer's in London. The crammer's charges made them gasp, but as Gavin had managed on a very small allowance at Cambridge there was still some money left; and by a lucky chance his mother was able to let the house, and pay a visit to her brother in Cumberland. Meantime Gavin lived at some wonderfully cheap lodgings which his mother discovered for him, so near the crammer's that it would save him his bus fare.

That was a very hot summer. The papers talked of the heat wave, and the temperature was placarded all over London. The cab horses turned out in sunbonnets which made them look quite ridiculous. The pavements positively burned people's feet. In the street where the lodgings were the air felt played out and

lifeless, and heavy with the smell of cooking—which seemed unnecessary, as it was far too hot to eat.

Gavin had been working twelve hours a day that last week, and his head ached unpleasantly; yet he felt an almost lightheaded exultation at the end of the first day's exam. He knew he had done well in both papers. But doubt returned to him during the night. He tried to remember exactly what he had written, and could not. He woke from a troubled dream of being ploughed, to a sensation of fatigue and illness, pains in his legs, and a queer taste in his mouth. Food revolted him, but he drank many cups of tea, and after poring over his books till the last minute, recklessly took a hansom and drove to Burlington Gardens, consumed with anxiety lest he should be late.

"If you don't slack off Buchan, and go for walks in the evening, you'll be ploughed in the medical," his friend Grey remarked when they came out of the examination room that afternoon.

"It's all right," Gavin told him, in an excited voice, "right as rain. I've just written a damn good essay."

Next morning he did not appear; and when later on Grey went to his lodgings, he found him in bed, very busy writing answers upon the edge of his counterpane. "I've passed old chap! I've passed first of the lot!" he announced, wagging his hand in the air and knocking over the tumbler of milk which stood souring by his bed. Then in a tearful voice he added "But I do want a drink—really cold this time, not just tepid".

It was enteric, and for eight weeks his recovery was doubtful: but in spite of relapses he pulled through, and was able to be taken to Cumberland to convalesce, just about the time that the list of successful candidates came out. Grey's name appeared in it about half-way down. Gavin's of course did not.

Thus inexorably the hopes and ambitions of years melted away just when accomplishment was in his grasp, and nothing seemed left except the possibility of being nominated for the Indian educational service later on, if he grew strong enough for India. "And we always rather looked down on the educational people, so many of them were not quite Sahibs you know"—said his mother sadly.¹

Meantime "country air and no more work for at least eighteen months," was the verdict of the local doctor who had known him since he was a little boy. "You've worked too hard all your life, young man. What you want now is not medicine but a thorough good rest."

¹ N.B.—Mrs. Buchan's opinion (formed forty-five years ago) is emphatically not the author's, to-day.

"Well but I must do something," said Gavin. "My mother's spent far more than she ought on our education, and I can't sponge on my uncle any longer. He's helped Charles a lot you know. He can't be allowed to support the entire family."

Six weeks later Gavin was at Brocksden, teaching Johnnie Wyse. Charles told his friends—"My young brother's gone out as a nursery governess". The faithful Grey declared that the Secretary of State, who must know that Buchan would have passed brilliantly, ought to do something about it. His mother described it as a tragedy. Gavin himself, though he said little, felt rather like a girl who has been jilted on the eve of her marriage.

But Brocksden was a bonny place, and with returning strength his bitterness imperceptibly vanished. He grew fond of Johnnie. The Wysees were kind, and gave him a sitting-room of his own. For the first time in his life he was able to read for pleasure, instead of for an exam.: and to his delight Sir Peter put him in charge of the excellent old library, and allowed him to spend about fifty pounds in bringing it up to date. The woods, fields and river were a joy to him; and to have so much leisure was unbelievably good. In fact until Clytie brought an element of discord upon the scene, Gavin had been almost completely happy.

6

The moors were bathed in sunshine when Clytie reached the top of Lammer Law, and sank down on the young heather with a sigh of exhaustion and happiness. Her face was scarlet, and her hair damp with heat. She had pulled off her jersey during the ascent, and was in her slip-bodice, her bare neck and arms tanned by the sun and reddened by the wind. Scrambling through a hedge she had torn her skirt and scratched her arm, which was still bleeding. Heaven knows what Lady Cecily would have felt could she have seen her now, flat on her back on the heather, her legs crossed, one foot kicked into the air, and her eyes fixed in ecstasy upon the cloudless sky. She was very tired and very happy. She had locked Mr. Buchan up in his own schoolroom, and run away again! She had run for miles and miles, and now the hills were all round her and not a house in sight, and it was not yet two. There were hours of freedom before her.

Above her head a lark was singing. She could just see it, a little black speck against the blue,—a gnat was all the size it looked; and it beat the air with its tiny wings and hovered up and down, while all the time out of its little throat poured a gush of palpitating song. Clytie's head sank back again into the heather.

She closed her eyes, and lay, drowsily listening. She could hear the voice of the river babbling and chuckling to himself far away down in the valley. Upon the lower slopes the ewes were calling to their half-grown lambs. "Ma-a-a, ma-a-a" they called in the quavering tones of anxious affection; and that shrill and trustful "may-ay, may-ay" was the little lambs answering them. Across the moorland sounded the call of the curlew, wild and desolate; while all around the plovers cried "peeweeet, peeweeet," and circled in the air, anxious lest the intruder should have come to rob their nests. A bumble bee buzzed round her for a little, and then flew away in search of some honey flower. Clytie's bosom rose and fell in long soft breaths. She was almost asleep, but through her drowsiness she was conscious of a new voice sounding in the valley below. "Cuc-koo" it cried and again "Cuc-koo". Then for a time all the world was still.

The sun had begun to take a downward course in the western sky, and the afternoon shadows were beginning to lengthen, before Clytie opened her eyes, blinked, yawned, smiled and sat up. "I've been asleep!" she told herself, feeling it a delightfully adventurous thing to have slept alone on the top of the moor. "O-o-oo" she yawned again and thought of sleeping a little longer; then realising that she was terribly hungry, she stretched out her hand towards her jersey. One knotted sleeve held a bit of dry bread. In the other was a pulpy purple mass which, sad reverse of fortune, two hours before had been a bunch of perfect hot-house grapes. She ate most heartily, enjoying every mouthful, and longing for more. She had intended the grapes for drink as well as food, but most of their juice had escaped en route, and a plucky effort to suck what remained out of her jersey sleeve proved a woolly and unquenching business.

One thing was now certain, before anything else she must have a drink. She wandered over the shoulder of the hill, and began descending, scanning the land around with a thirsty eye. The river was down there, a long way off, and its water might not be good to drink; but a good deal nearer there was a small valley filled with rowan trees and birches. It sloped in the direction of the river. There was certainly a burn running through it.

As she steered her course towards it, her feet presently sank in a bit of soft ground. Muddy water trickled into her shoes. She bounded, and landed in an even softer place. "Hurrah!" she cried—"this is the beginning of my burn."

Sure enough at the far end of the bog she came on a small

trickle of water, which wound away down the hill in the direction of the wooded valley. It was a very poor imitation of a burn certainly, and it seemed aware of the fact, for it crawled along half a foot under the earth, while the rushes and grass joined hands above it as if to hide it from sight. She stooped down, and a number of little water beasts scuttled away as she dipped in her hand. She stood up again, feeling like the boy in the fairy story who was terribly thirsty, and came to a burn which, as he was going to drink, growled in his ear, "Whoever drinks of me will turn into a tiger". Clytie could imagine this ignoble little lowland burn murmuring in a muddy voice, "Whoever drinks of me will turn into a water beetle". Thirstier than ever, and very disgusted, she addressed it thus—"Call yourself a burn! If it was in the hills around Standalone, it's a ditch you would be called, or a drain—nothing better. I wish you could see how the burns up there begin—coming up out of the spring, and away down the hill-side jumping and singing for joy. That's the kind of burn you can follow the whole day long, and never tire."

Petulantly she turned away from it and made a bee-line for the little valley, now only half a mile away. The going was heavy, withered bracken and heather almost up to her knees, and for a few minutes she felt cross and hot, for the thought of Standalone always brought to her an aching longing. Then she discovered that the despised little burn had gone faster than she, and was running across her path once more. It had grown wider and deeper, and as the hill grew steeper it was beginning to leap and splash with a sunny babble over the pebbles. With a sigh of relief she threw herself on her face, put her mouth down to the water, and drank long and deep. It was ice cold and delicious. She leapt to her feet again, ready for anything now, and followed it downwards with a lilted step.

The little glen grew more delightful at every turn. It was yellow with primroses now, and she picked them, and smelt them, and nibbled their tender stalks, and made them into a daisy chain and wound it round her head. Among the moss of the bank she found a robin's nest with little naked birds in it which she tried to feed with primrose petals, but they spat them out. Thrushes sang shrilly, and flew from rowan to birch tree with a pleasant fluttering of brown wings. Then suddenly the burn seemed to feel that the day was passing and no time to be lost, and, babbling louder than he had ever babbled before, he darted out of sight round a bend of the hill, and when she caught him up she saw him leaping with his silver hair flying

round him, sheer down fifteen feet of cliff, and landing at the bottom with such a splutter of laughter that the stones around were covered with the greenest moss in the world. Then, as it were tired out by his effort, he lay down and went to sleep in a long narrow pool, which was golden in the sunshine, and brown in the shade.

"But this is just—bermilder!" cried Clytie in ecstasy.

She glanced around her. There was not a soul, not even a sheep in sight. With hands which were clumsy with eagerness she unhooked her skirt, slipped off the rest of her clothes all in one, and stole down to the edge of the pool. Her hot and weary little body panted for the embrace of the water. Where the sun fell on it, she could see right to the bottom. It was quite deep enough for a dive. She threw up her arms and jumped in head first, gasping with mingled fear and joy as the cold water closed upon her.

Little waves rushed to the shore. The kind of whirlpool which she had made in disappearing grew calm again before her sleek wet head came to the surface at the far end of the pool. She clambered out, and took another running jump into the burn. It felt much less cold this time, and she swam up and down, floated motionless in the sunshiny shallows, and turned head over heels again and again, for she loved the giddy feeling which it gave her and the queer moonlight effect of the sun seen from upside down through the water. At last she stepped ashore and lay down in the sunshine upon the grass. From top to toe she felt as if she had been made quite new again—that delicious feeling which comes only to the naked bather who dries himself in the sunshine. Well did she remember the last time she had bathed, at a public swimming bath in Eastonburgh, dressed in a horrible serge bathing dress with a little skirt, and Fraulein sitting in a kind of balcony above, with her watch in her hand, since no girl was allowed to stay in more than ten minutes. What a melancholy kind of bathing that had been; all the other girls in the water too, and a lot of aimless squealing and splashing and ducking: and nobody seeming to notice that she swam as well as all the rest of them put together. Oh that school—that awful hideous school. The slender twig of a birch tree swayed with a maliciously suggestive motion between her eyes and the blue sky. She reddened painfully—sprang to her feet, and darted to the foot of the waterfall. Gripping the root of a tree with her hands she swung herself up, and screamed to find herself in the rough embrace of the burn. The water

was too strong for her ; she escaped from it with difficulty, and climbed up the slippery rocks at the side. How strong and light it made you feel to have nothing on ! There she sat, on a mossy stone at the top of the fall, the sun shining on her back, her legs dangling in the rushing water.

In the wood below the cuckoo was sweetly and incessantly calling.

7

It was a clear starlight night, and a small dishevelled figure was trudging along the road which runs from Lammerton church to Brocksden. She was very tired by now, and so sleepy that she had even stopped feeling afraid of the darkness. In a half-daze she staggered along, when suddenly she realised that two bright lights were bearing down upon her. She sprang to one side, and a dogcart trotted quickly by, its lamps shining full on her face as she stood on the edge of the grass. She walked on again, but a grizzly tale of Nanna's came unbidden to her mind. It was in the Highlands. A little girl had been sent to the village to buy something, on just such an evening as this. A little later a dogcart with two men in it, and a big box tied on behind, drove by her father's croft. Farther on the men stopped at the village inn for a drink, and the landlady remembered afterwards that her dog had kept sniffing round the back of the cart, and howling dismally. That was all the story. The men drove out of sight, and the little girl was never seen again.

"Hey you ! I say stop !" a harsh voice was calling to her.

Clytie's hair rose upon her head. A prickly sensation came all over her. She would have fled, but her limbs failed her.

"Stop I tell you." The dogcart had turned and was coming after her.

"Are you Miss MacLeod ?"

"Yes" she answered faintly.

"Well I'm Dr. MacWhirter. I've just come from Brocksden. They're in a fine way about you there, so I suppose I'd better just drive you back."

The other man in the cart jumped down, and went to the horse's head. It was a high dogcart, and Clytie was almost too weary to climb up into it. The doctor put out his hand, and jerked her crossly into the seat beside him. "Ye can go home, John. I'll be back under an hour" said he, and they drove on.

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After some ten minutes of complete silence, the doctor said—
"D'ye know what took me to Brocksden to-night?"

"No."

"I found your aunt in the most serious condition, hysterics, palpitation and all the rest of it. What do you suppose was the cause of that?"

"I don't know."

"Think it over and perhaps you'll guess."

His manner was inexpressibly biting. Clytie thought him the most disagreeable man she had ever met. If she had not been so very tired she would have jumped out of his cart and walked. As she thought about it she fell into an uneasy dose, and woke with a start to realise that the doctor was once again talking to her.

"—What did she take it into her head but that you were off to the Highlands again, like the time you ran away before. . . . Oh yes, I know about that affair too you see—but that's not my business."

"It is not," said Clytie dryly.

"No—but her Ladyship's health is—" shouted the doctor, turning so violently upon her that she shrank back scared against the side of the cart. "When I saw her this afternoon she was in a state of nervous prostration, I had to give her bromide to calm her. Now I'll tell you something Miss MacLeod!" (he laid a cutting emphasis on her name as if that too were an offence to him). "Your aunt's heart is not in a good condition. I've suspected it for some time, but to-day I was sure of it. I believe it to be only a temporary affection which will pass away in a year or so and leave her none the worse. But for the present she's got to take care. She can't stand being worried, and she mustn't be either.—You understand that?"

The horse was forging, so the doctor gave it a vicious cut with his whip, cleared his throat, and continued—

"What I mean is, there must be no more of those disappearances of yours—away the whole day and nobody knowing what the devil's become of you. My certy young lady! if you were a daughter of mine, it isn't only a scolding you'd get if you played such a prank with me, I can tell you that. However, I've warned you. If anything more happens to upset her Ladyship, I won't be answerable for the consequences."

The sound of a bicycle bell behind them brought the doctor's homily to an abrupt conclusion. Angrily he called out—"Where's your lamp?" then—"Oh—is that you, Buchan?"

Mr. Buchan jumped off his bicycle, and came alongside the dogcart.

"This is most kind of you doctor. I hope it's not very inconvenient," he said. He did not even look at Clytie.

"That's all right. Not far out of my way. I was going to White-Hill anyhow. I've a case there I'm not happy about. Where have you been?"

"To Berwick station," said Gavin dryly.

The doctor whistled. "Fifteen miles there and back, on a bad road in the dark!"

Gavin shrugged his shoulders and got on to his bicycle. "I'll ride on," he called.

"Pretty fair amount of trouble for one young lady to give because she takes it into her head to play herself," commented the doctor grimly.

The hot stinging blood had rushed into Clytie's face. She bit her lip and winked hard in a vain endeavour to repress her tears. The lights of Brocksden were visible now, shining in a double row through the night. All too quickly they rolled towards them.

The romance and adventure of her flight had completely vanished. She was simply a naughty, selfish, disobedient girl, being brought home in disgrace. All the grown-ups in the world seemed to be banded against her. Oh! how she longed to be through with it all, and safe with Nanna in her own room.

8

"Sic a steer tae mak an a' because a bairn gaes for a daunder by hersel' on a fine simmer's day!" was Nanna's comment on the situation. Not that Nanna herself would have viewed it so leniently, had the scene been Standalone, and hers the authority slighted. But to see her bairn so scolded and cast down by others, was more than she could bear in silence.—"Inty the libary tae her uncle. Inty the bedroom tae her anty!—And it past ten o'clock—" she remarked caustically to Watkins the lady's maid, who had joined her in the passage in order that Lady Cecily's interview with her errant niece might be strictly *in camera*. With relief she perceived the tutor coming upstairs from the dining-room where he had been having a late supper. Here at least was somebody whom she might attack with impunity. Placing herself in his path, she resolutely accosted him—"When her anty's tired o' scoldin' her, Miss Clytie isna gawn tae see

onybody else the nicht, Mr. Buchan; an' tae my way o' thinkin' it's a daft game, a' this rowin' and jawin' at the bairn when she's fair worn oot, and should be in her bed."

"I don't want to talk to her," said Gavin. "You can put her to bed as soon as you like, nurse.—And the longer you can keep her there, the better for everybody. Good night," and he walked on.

With a malicious recollection of this remark, Nanna was careful next morning to allow Clytie to have her sleep out. It was a long one, for happy childhood recuperates spirits and vigour through oblivion, where the grown-up person awakens betimes to the troubles of another day. It was nearly eleven before Clytie came, rather uncertainly, into the schoolroom. A glance at Mr. Buchan's face made her heart sink into her boots; he looked as if he had never smiled in his life. Johnnie, however, glanced up from his book with a broad grin.

"I'm sorry I'm late. Nobody waked me," she faltered.

Mr. Buchan pointed to a chair beside the empty fireplace.—"Go on, Johnnie," he said. And the lesson continued, exactly as if nobody had come into the room.

The minutes crawled by, and every tick of the clock made Clytie feel more foolish. Her cheeks began to burn. She assumed as nonchalant an attitude as possible, and stuck up her feet against the guard. It fell on its face with a disconcerting clatter. At last the clock struck eleven, and Mr. Buchan shut his book.

"You can have a few minutes off now, Johnnie. I tell you what—run to Peter's cottage and see if he's mended the top of my rod. Say I want it for this afternoon."

Astonished delight and baffled curiosity were visible in Johnnie's open countenance. He had been quite looking forward to the awful row which there was bound to be this morning between his tutor and Clytie; and if he went away now he would miss it. But the chance of getting out, even for ten minutes, in the middle of his lessons, was too good to lose. He left the room with alacrity. When he had gone there was silence in the schoolroom. Mr. Buchan was leaning back in his chair looking straight in front of him. Clytie sat waiting, with a sinking sensation inside her. Oh, how she wished he would speak and get it over. She shuffled her feet uneasily, and kicked the fender again.

Mr. Buchan turned his head and looked at her.

"Are you going to do what I tell you after this, or not?" he asked; and his voice sounded like a file grating on iron.

Poor Clytie, after vainly endeavouring to meet with spirit his cold grey eye, looked down at the carpet, and muttered something.

"I can't hear what you say."

"I don't know" repeated Clytie desperately.

"Think it over then, until you find out."

He turned away, drew a sheet of paper towards him, and began writing. The scratching sound of his pen seemed to paralyse Clytie's thinking capacity. He had turned his page, and was half-way down the second, before an unsteady voice blurted out—"I don't mind doing my lessons".

"That's very good of you, but that wasn't what I asked you. If you don't remember my question, I can repeat it."

After another pause Clytie, half-defiantly half-appealingly, answered—"I don't see—I mean how *can* I promise to do everything you tell me, Mr. Buchan. . . . It would be just like being a slave."

"Very well. You can go then" said Gavin, speaking very quietly.

"Where to?" asked Clytie, bewildered.

"Out of this schoolroom. And you needn't come back until you're prepared to obey me."

"But—my lessons?"

Looking up from his letter, for he had begun writing again, Gavin said grimly—"I'm not going to teach anyone who won't do what I tell them. . . . Perhaps governesses stand this sort of thing. I don't. Probably the best plan will be to get a governess for you—that's as Lady Cecily likes. But one thing's certain, anybody I teach has got to fall into line and do what they're told—and whether it's a boy or a girl, it makes no difference; they've equally got to behave themselves in this schoolroom. Do you understand?"

"I'll go at once," said Clytie in a choked voice. She got on to her feet, and walked with considerable dignity towards the door. On the threshold, in spite of herself, the passionate words burst out,—"*And if you think I mind going, you're wrong! I like it. I don't want to stay here. And—I'll never come back and say I'm sorry . . . because, I hate you, Mr. Buchan!*"

Two mornings after this Clytie, waking to hear the rain-drops pattering from the eaves, hid her face in the pillow, and burst into

tears. *Another wet day!* It was beastly. Everything was beastly. . . . And it would soon be time to get up and go down to another of those dreadful breakfasts, with nobody talking to her.

To look back on the last two days was looking down a vista of muddy roads overhung by dripping trees; or, if you left the road, squashy grass, among which the last daffodils hung their heads, transparent with wetness. The alternative had been Nanna's room, with Nanna herself crouching over the fire as cross as two sticks with rheumatism, and all the story-books in the schoolroom, so that she was driven to seek amusement by reading the Apocrypha. But it was not the rain only. She was used to rain at Standalone. It was the atmosphere of cold displeasure which surrounded her. Aunt Cecily was lying on sofas pretending to be ill, and Uncle Peter's manner towards her was changed. The very lady's maid seemed to regard her with genteel disapproval. The day before she had trudged for hours along muddy roads, simply in order to get away from it all, and had lighted on a small village with a smiddy and a sweet shop where she had purchased a pennyworth of gundy which had slightly consoled her. Then on the way home, turning the corner near the lodge gates, she had suddenly come face to face with Mr. Buchan! He had raised his cap, and for a moment she believed he was going to speak to her. But he had walked on, leaving her more forlorn, more consciously an outcast than before.

And to-day was Saturday. A gush of self-pity overwhelmed her, making her tears flow again. She had a good mind to drown herself, in that black pool in the river. . . . They would look for her everywhere, and at last they would find her and carry her in. Aunt Cecily would shriek and faint, and Mr. Buchan, at the sight of that still white face with wet hair dripping on the floor, would stagger back, groaning,—“My God—this is my doing!”

Heavily the day wore on, until between five and six in the afternoon Clytie was sitting huddled up in the wicker chair by Nanna's fire, reading “Ada and Gerty” which she had seized out of the schoolroom bookcase in Mr. Buchan's absence. By the window stood a plate of toffee in the making of which she had endeavoured to while away the long hours: but there was something wrong with it too, for why did it remain liquid and buttery? Clytie was listlessly wondering why girls who were at story-book schools were always suspected of stealing—even at the Mamzelles they had never accused her of that—and why there was such a lot about God, unnecessarily dragged in at each crisis in the story;—

when suddenly her back straightened and her bored face glowed with life, for looking towards the window she had seen a patch of blue sky. She rushed to open it, and even as she did so the sun burst out and all the birds began to sing.

Ten minutes later she was out and away from that horrid inside world of cold looks and disgrace, and was again surrounded by the old real world of adventures and dreams. The primroses were all spoilt, the bluebells drooping down among the grass; but from the earth rose a delicious smell of wet life, and the forget-me-nots at least had enjoyed the rain. The beeches showered drops upon her bare head as she passed under them: looking up she received the libation full on her face, and laughed to see the sun shining through their wet greenness. Did the gude folk, the wee folk, hate rainy days as much as she did, she wondered, and almost saw them creeping out of the twilight of the tree-boles where they had sheltered, their garments clinging round them like the wet petals of the primroses.

A wind came wandering through the wood, setting all the leaves a-dancing and swaying the upper boughs. It would be grand to be up there with the birds, close to the blue sky. Clytie was a great climber of trees, and she displayed in this noble exercise that mixture of spring, clear-sightedness and prudence which was so lamentably lacking in her relations with human beings. On this occasion she found that a certain broad-girthed Lowland beech tree was a much tougher proposition than its slender Highland sisters. Again and again her stockinged feet—for what born-climber climbs in shoes?—slithered back on to the nut-strewn ground. Her hands grew green and slippery with vain efforts to grip elusive knots and stumps. Panting and eager-eyed, she drew back to survey the unconquered citadel, and, perceiving at the back of the tree a more likely route of ascent, leapt upon its cold body once more. It was a moment of triumph when, after twelve feet of painful swarming up the wet trunk, she gripped hold of a solid bough at last. The rest was easy, although the grey lichen was so slippery with the rain that caution was needed. Higher and higher she crept, until suddenly her head came out against the sky, and she saw all leafland spread around her, and beyond that the park, and Brocksden looking like a toy house, with a tiny figure which must be Uncle Peter crossing the gravel with a black dog at his heels. Lying back and grasping the branches, she began swaying to and fro. The wind came again, and all the beech tree swayed also with a rhythmic enchanting motion, like the rocking of a dinghy upon gentle waves.

‘ITHER FOLKS’ WEANS ARE AN UNCO FASH” ❧

Meanwhile somebody else had taken advantage of the break, and this was Mr. Buchan, who, a mile farther up the river, was endeavouring to perfect himself in the gentle art of angling. No experienced piscator, would, of course, have attempted to fish in such a flood, but Gavin did not know this. You had only to watch him, stiffly casting upstream, conscientiously wagglng the tip of his rod, casting again and getting his line caught in the tree behind him, to see that he was a beginner of beginners. He had always rather wanted to fish, and the discovery of Walton’s “Complete Angler” in the Brocksden library had made him resolved to do so. He had been working away at it now for the last month, but had not yet had the encouragement of catching even one trout, although the week before he had actually hooked two. This evening, having cast his line into every likely pool, and disentangled it from a dozen trees, he became thoroughly disheartened.

“It’s no good. I think I’ll give the beastly thing up altogether. I wish I hadn’t wasted my money on this rotten rod. It’s clouding over again. I shall chuck it.”

Whistling mournfully, he took down his despised rod, picked up the landing net, as yet virgin to the touch of trout, and tramped away along the bank, the water squilching in his boots at each step. The sunshine had gone and it was drawing in to a dour grey evening. A steady drizzle began to fall. He walked briskly, indulging in pleasant thoughts of hot buttered toast by his own fireside, and the new Anatole France which Grey had sent to him.

Rounding a bend of the woodland path he came upon Clytie, sitting half-way up the bank above him. She looked at him wistfully, and he half-paused, believing she was going to speak: but as she said nothing, he strode on again in a severe silence. . . . It was getting beyond a joke, this business, altogether. Tiresome brat! She had lost half a week of lessons already. Sending her to Coventry was a dead failure. She was simply running wild and enjoying it. Something would have to be done about it—but what, he had not an idea. . . . He had got to the wooden bridge and was half-way across it before the thought struck him that to sit on wet grass in the gathering dusk was a queer kind of enjoyment. What on earth was she doing it for? Did she imagine that, if she got a bad enough cold, they would send her back to the Highlands? By gad! he would soon put a stop to that game! Compressing his lips, he wheeled round, and began striding back again. . . . What an infernal nuisance that girl made of herself. It was after six already—too late now to have that hot buttered toast which he had looked forward to all the afternoon.

The sight of Clytie coming towards him on her hands and knees along the muddy path added fuel to his irritation.—“Get up at once. What on earth are you doing? I am ashamed of you,” he shouted.

At the sound of his voice she started, and collapsed in a huddled mass in the middle of the path.

“Get up!” he repeated, looking uncommonly as if he were going to shake her.

“I c-can’t,” she told him, the corners of her mouth drooping.

“We’ll soon see if you can’t!” he remarked, catching hold of her arm.

“Don’t!” she almost shrieked. “Don’t pull me. My ankle.” . . .

“Your ankle?”

“I’ve hurt it”—her face was twisted with pain. “I can’t walk, it hurts too much. It hurts just frightfully since you pulled me.”

“Twisted your ankle have you?” Gavin’s expression changed to one of concern. “Which ankle is it? Let me have a look at it, Clytie. . . . H’m. Yes. It is a bit swelled certainly. Can you move your foot?”

Clytie gave a smothered groan. Gavin’s suspicions became aroused. She had possibly sprained her ankle, but he felt convinced she was making the most of it for her own ends.—Anyhow with a monkey like her, one could not be sure. “I’ll bind it up for you” said he, and went down to the river to dip his handkerchief. “Nothing like cold water for a sprain,” he remarked as he returned. “Now. . . . Yes I’m afraid it’s bound to hurt a bit—but I want to get it as tight as possible so as to give you support. Can you bear it a bit tighter yet?”

Clytie, who had certainly grown very pale, set her teeth and nodded.

“There. It’s not much of a job, but it’s the best I can make of it.”

He rose to his feet, and stood looking down at her. “We must be getting back now.—How did you do it?”

“I was climbing a tree——”

“Climbing a tree? Climbing a tree all by yourself on a beastly wet evening?”

His tone was incredulous. He did not believe that girls of Clytie’s age climbed trees, not at least when there was nobody there to admire them. “And you fell down from the tree I suppose?” he asked with a slight smile.

“The bark was so wet, I couldn’t grip——”

"Well, come along now. Give me your hand." He pulled her gently on to her feet—or foot rather, for like a stork she stood on one. "Take my arm," he said kindly. "Lean on me as much as you like. We'll go quite slowly."

He was prepared for an exaggerated limp, but not for her moving along beside him in a series of spasmodic hops. "That's no good"—he told her gently but firmly. "You can't hop all the way back to the house you know. If it hurts as much as all that, I must carry you of course. But it would really be better if you tried to use it. The best possible cure for a sprain is to walk on it you know."

His tone subtly suggested that he too had sprained ankles, and, smiling at the pain, had walked them sound again. Flushing scarlet, Clytie loosened her hold upon his arm, and setting her teeth, stepped boldly on to her injured foot. An extraordinarily poignant stabbing pain shot up her leg; the path swung suddenly up towards her; the sound of the river grew so loud that it seemed to be rushing through her head. Then everything stopped.

Gradually she became conscious, first of a queer smell like wet Harris tweed, and next that the rain was falling on her face. For a time she lay quiescent, hoping that the pain in her leg would remain as it was and not get worse. At last she slowly opened her eyes, and realised, with indifference, that she was lying in the hated Mr. Buchan's arms.

"Oh. . . . What's happened?" she murmured, restraining with difficulty an unreasonable desire to burst into tears.

"It's all right. Lie still." . . .

Feeling sick and confused, Clytie was very ready to do so; but a languid curiosity made her presently open her eyes again, and look up at his face. It was a very different face to what it had been a little time ago. The sarcastic expression had vanished, leaving one of consternation and remorse.

"D'you feel a bit better, Clytie?"

"Yes thanks. . . . Only—I don't think I can walk any more——"

"Good God! no—of course you can't walk. But look here I must get you home as quick as possible. Clasp your hands round my neck—will you?"

He was gently lifting her from the ground. He was going to carry her!

"Please don't. I'm too heavy. I'd rather——"

Paying no heed to her faint remonstrances, he had left the path and was carrying her down the bank towards the river.

LOVE IN A MIST

"Where are you going?"

"To ford the river—much shorter this way. . . . Look here, Clytie—if you don't hang on round my neck I shall probably drop you in the middle!" He waded in, slipping and lurching over the wet hidden stones. In spite of herself Clytie clasped his neck convulsively. The water rose till it was well above his knee. In mid-stream he staggered, and nearly came down; but he recovered his balance, and bracing himself against the current reached the other bank.

As he toiled slowly up it through the wet grass, Clytie began silently but resolutely struggling to be put down.

"What's the matter. Keep quiet I tell you. . . . What the devil are you trying to do, Clytie?"

"I don't want to be carried."

"Nonsense—of course you've got to be carried."

He plodded on at an ever slower pace, his breath growing more and more uneven, and his face red with irritation and heat. At last with an angry snort he deposited her upon the soaking grass—and sat down beside her.

"Is this what you want then? A nice dry spot isn't it?—We can sit here as long as you like——"

Clytie said nothing.

"This is childish, Clytie. It's simply folly. D'you want to get pneumonia? I shall carry you back whether you want it or not. D'you realise you've broken your ankle?"

"Have I? I thought I had."

"Well then—why won't you let me carry you?"

"I—I—" she struggled vainly to express herself with calm dignity, but found herself bursting into tears instead. . . . "Don't you see—how can I let you carry me—when we're such enemies—" she sobbed. . . . "I'm wearing your coat too." She made a feeble effort to take it off, which he instantly prevented. "Please go away, and send Nanna to me."

For answer Gavin resolutely took her up in his arms and rose to his feet. He had walked several yards before he said—

"Never mind about all that. After this we're not going to be enemies any more."

CHAPTER III

"MY LOVE SHE'S BUT A LASSIE YET"

I

THE brilliant youthful green of the trees had imperceptibly changed to a middle-aged workaday hue, and their shape had assumed the solid dignity of a dowager's petticoats, before Clytie was able to hobble as far as the garden, where the small yellow gooseberries were worth pricked fingers, and the early pears were ripening on the red brick wall. The borders were full of pinks and roses which scented the air as you passed by. From the fields beyond the park came the pleasant whirring of the reaping machine, and soon half the country-side would be prickly stubble and golden stooks. It was a wonderful summer all over Scotland. At Standalone the moors were glowing like a purple amethyst and the sea was sapphire coloured in the sunshine; but Clytie seldom now heard the voice of Standalone calling her. Yet it was not the serene and fruitful beauty of the Merse which had woo'd her heart from its first wild love, for, upon that August day when Gavin departed very cheerfully for his six weeks' holiday, she wandered forlornly among the meadow sweet and willow herb of the river banks, and through the beechwoods, nor found any comfort in their beauty. Thereafter she counted the holidays as a little schoolboy counts the lesson days which divide him from his mother and his home. For Mr. Buchan was no longer an enemy but her own familiar friend. And though in those early days this may have meant little enough to him, it was much to her who had never had a friend yet, nor loved anyone, except old Nanna and Standalone.

Children's parties were few in Lothianshire in those days, but sometimes Clytie and Johnnie were invited to spend the afternoon at Langlea with the little Mappetts. They went reluctantly, and Johnnie, while there, showed off so unceasingly and spoke such broad Scotch that Mrs. Mappett's pink eyebrows would rise higher and higher until they almost disappeared in her fluffy fringe, and

Colonel Mappett's face assume a permanent expression of—"my word! young gentleman—if you were one of my boys!"—which symptoms of disapproval gave much inward satisfaction to Johnnie.

The eldest Mappett, Rose, became presently a frequent visitor at Brocksden, for she had conceived a *schwärmerei* for Clytie. One day in the shrubbery she made a formal declaration of the same, putting her arms round Clytie's neck and entreating her to become her best friend. At this Clytie, who wanted no friend except her beloved Mr. Buchan who would be back before so very long now, grew scarlet, but could see no way out of the situation except awkwardly to kiss Rose in return, and mumble in a tone of forced affection—"Thank you awfully, Rose".

But when in September Gavin returned, sunburnt and lean after a strenuous and economical walking tour in Italy with his college friend Swinton, the happiness of being with him again was not that which Clytie had been dreaming of all those weeks. Gavin had fallen in love with Italy, and could think of nothing but going there again. Moreover, after the delightful freedom and intimacy of wandering with a friend, he found schoolroom life and the society of a little girl very unsatisfying. In those long letters to Swinton which he spent his evenings in writing, he complained that Brocksden was like sleeping on a feather-bed after lying on heather; that the cooking was dangerously good, and he felt himself rapidly turning into a stout and flabby pedagogue. "I've been stirring up the India office," he wrote, "but they say there's no chance of a job until next summer at earliest. I think they mean to give me one though when there's a vacancy. But before then—Italy, my Italy. We must and will have another walk there, Robin, before I go hence and am no more seen."

Poor Clytie! At fourteen the pangs of despised love are hard to bear. Gavin was perfectly unaware of any change in his manner to her, but to Clytie, intensely aware of his every gesture, this very unconsciousness was a desolating thing. Pride came to her rescue. After the first rapturous greeting of him—which she now remembered with burning cheeks—she withdrew into herself, falling into her old solitary ways again, though they had now lost their savour. When in a week or so Gavin began to settle down, and to wish for his red-haired Clytie's companionship again, he had to seek her out. "What do you do with yourself nowadays? I never can find you"—he remarked half-irritably one day, and never guessed the joy which tingled through her at his words. So, presently, with neither recognised coolness nor spoken reconciliation, all was as it had been before.

Autumn was come, and the hedges were red with hips and haws and barberries. In the early mornings a white mist hung over the river, and the grass in the park was like the fairy queen's mantle all overlaid with diamonds of frost and pearls of dew. The dahlias and holy pokers in the central walk of the garden blazed like a Russian Ballet, while against the wall the ripe apricots glowed like the chrysoprases in the gates of Heaven. A fire was very welcome in the evenings, but it was quite hot in the middle of the day though it was now October.

Clytie had been giving Gavin a burning account of a picnic to the Lammermoors which Lady Cecily had got up in the holidays. "I wanted to go alone, or just with Johnnie; and then Aunt Cecily asked *all* the Mappetts to come too. No, you may laugh but it wasn't one bit funny; it was just awful—all of us walking about together, and 'Put on your hat dear or you will get freckled'. And there was the river beside us, and a boiling day, and nobody allowed to bathe! I never hated anything more."

"Sounds topping! I'll tell you what, Clytie, we'll go there next Saturday."

"Oh!" Clytie's face expressed pure ecstasy. "Just you and Johnnie and me, nobody else. And we'll bathe."

"Well—I was thinking of asking the Mappetts, or anyhow that nice Fraulein of theirs. Then while Johnnie and I bathe, you can talk to her."

When Mr. Buchan made a plan it generally matured, so in spite of sundry objections on Lady Cecily's part (to whom no word of bathing was breathed however) Saturday found them driving up the road which meandered steeply through fir woods, and suddenly came out upon the purple moor through which it ran with never a fence to keep the small black-faced sheep from straying across it. The air was like wine making them all so hungry that they ate their sandwiches at mid-day sitting in the sunshine on the top of the Law. Later on they dropped down to the river, and there coming upon a long deep green pool with a rock running out into the middle of it, as though nature had created it to be dived off, hey presto! out of the mysterious bundle which Clytie had smuggled in under the seat of the dogcart, appeared bathing dresses. The broad red and white stripes of Sir Peter's dress made Gavin appear quite portly; while Clytie in her scanty blue stockinette, looked like a will o' the wisp. Watching her flash into the water from the highest pinnacle of the rock, and swim away down the pool with her hair floating round her, Gavin regretted the blue garment, for without it she would have been like one of

the soulless happy water nixies whose white bodies gleam in solitary pools to this very day. . . . Johnnie was simply arrayed in a pair of shorts, which were greatly in need of a belt to keep them on. He was in his most whimsical—or as Colonel Mappett would have described it “his showing-off mood”; making elaborate preparations for each dive, then tumbling in with a smack which made the woods echo; manifesting excessive terror when he found himself out of his depth; climbing out, clutching his descending garments, then with a falsetto shriek tumbling in backwards, and beginning to drown in two feet of water.

They were all three so happy, “wantoning like young dace” in the sun-warmed water, it was with reluctance that Gavin remembered that he was a responsible grown-up person whose duty it was to proclaim “time to come out”. He said it at last however. Clytie modestly retired into the hawthorn brake which was her tiring room, and Gavin and Johnnie basked naked in the sunshine until they were dry, as the need for profound secrecy had made the bringing of towels inexpedient.

They had tea at a keeper's cottage, thick girdle scones and heather honey, then homewards they drove through the gathering twilight, all squeezed together in the front seat, as Johnnie, for reasons of his own which subsequently appeared, refused to sit behind.

“Well Clytie—was it as nice as the Mappett picnic?” said Gavin, as they trotted along the level between fields of stubble.

“Not quite as perfect as that—but thank you very much for a pleasant day” says Clytie, in the artificial tones of the departing guest.

“Lammer Law's better than Standalone—isn't it?”

“Rather”—Clytie's tone was killing sarcasm.

“Muddie says Standalone's just an ordinary Highland shooting box,” observed Johnnie.

Clytie's face grew suddenly red.

“Such a scratch lot of old furniture. . . . hens running about the doors . . . not like a gentleman's house at all, more like a farm!” Johnnie's tone was so exact an imitation of his mother's voice that Gavin bit his lip to avoid laughing.

Clytie's sense of humour seemed to be in abeyance. She made a great effort to maintain a scornful silence; then suddenly shouted—“one foot of Standalone moor is worth all your Brocksden parks and drawing-rooms put together!”

“The wonder is they got anyone to take it,” went on Johnnie, serenely ignoring the interruption.

Clytie threw the rug off her knees and sprang to her feet. "I'll walk home!" she announced.

"Sit down at once. Never stand up in a moving trap," said Gavin sharply.

Who's in a wax
Who's in a wax
Boo—hoo boo—hoo—Who's in a wax!

chanted Johnnie.

Clytie's hand swung out in the direction of his cheek, but Gavin caught it. In a tone of pious horror he ejaculated—"Miss MacLeod! I am shocked!"

"I say, can I drive now? There's no more real downhill"—said Johnnie.

"All right. Change places." Gavin crushed himself into the lower seat beside Clytie, and looked, smiling, into her frowning face.

"You remember, in the "Fairchild Family," what happened to Emily for striking her sister Lucy?—how the excellent Mr. Fairchild 'took down a rod and whipped the hands of the children until they smarted again, repeating as he did so—

Let dogs delight to bark and bite
For 'tis their nature to,
But children you should never let
Your angry passions rise
Your little hands were never meant
To tear each other's eyes. . . .'

When we get back I must inquire whether there is a suitable skeleton in the neighbourhood, for I fear I shall have to take you to see it to-morrow as a warning."

To this burst of eloquence Clytie returned no answer, but, sitting as far away from him as the narrow seat permitted, continued to gaze stonily out across the fields.

There was a long silence.

"A sad case.—No sense of humour—none whatever. Just like a woman—" soliloquised Gavin.

"I *have*."

"Wasn't one bit amused at my little joke."

The corners of Clytie's mouth trembled.

"As for Johnnie—he's only got to murmur 'Standalone' and you rise like a trout!"

The pony's feet sounded loud as they drove over the bridge.

"Tut! man—the post, mind the post—!" and "The gate post, Master Johnnie—" exclaimed Gavin and the groom simultaneously.

They shaved it by quarter of an inch, and whirled into the avenue.

"A perfect turn in," said Johnnie complacently.

"... Rather hopeless—people who can't see a thing's funny if it's about themselves"—Gavin continued his soliloquy.

"Well . . . but I——"

"But you?"

"I won't be like that any more—" she murmured, looking up at him, her eyes full of the adoring trustfulness of a dog as he watches his master.

2

"Do you know, Clytie, my new stays have bones in them just like Mamma's," said Rose.

"Have they? how horrid. I wouldn't wear things like that."

"—Oh, but they fit me!" Rose hastened to assure her. She was standing before Clytie's glass, pulling her blouse down at the back, and loosening it at the front. Picking up Clytie's brush, she smoothed her hair, fluffed it out at the sides, and tied it back with a broad black ribbon. Tilting the glass to an angle which permitted her to judge of the general effect, she said with innocent satisfaction—"I'm getting quite a figure".

"I'm not anyhow."

"Well but, I think you are, Clytie. I noticed it in church when you had on your new dress."

"Nonsense!" said Clytie angrily, for in her heart she knew it was true. As her fifteenth birthday approached, her flat childish bosom had begun gently to round and swell. This natural phenomenon filled her with rage and despair, for she was like Peter Pan the boy who never wished to grow up. In a vain endeavour to conceal her budding maidenhood, she wore her blouses as loose as possible, and refused to tighten her belt a single hole.

Glowing scornfully she now demanded—"What makes you want to be grown up, Rose? You'll never be a child again!"

"—I'm not a child now! . . . Why, it's ever so much nicer to be grown up of course. Just think what it means. Being out of the schoolroom—no more lessons—not having to obey Fräulein any more—and having an allowance of my own. Mamma says I am to have twenty pounds! Then I can choose my own dresses. Think of that.—Yours are all right, Lady Cecily has such good taste. But I——" she was going to say, "I can't bear the way Mamma dresses me!" but being loyal to the core, she checked herself, and turned it into "I'd like to choose my own. . . . Then

the dances, Clytie. Mamma says she'll take me to all the Edinburgh balls when I come out. Won't that be simply lovely!"

"But that won't be for ages yet. You're only fifteen."

"Nearly sixteen," Rose corrected her; "and lots of girls come out at seventeen. Mamma did, I know, and that would only be about a year to wait.—Oh dear—I wish Pappa would let me go to a finishing school. Not a horrid school like the one you hated of course," she added hastily, "but a really nice one, like that one in Paris the Jardines went to, where you learn how to dance, and music and singing, and how to lift your skirt when you cross the road—the French are so graceful. Mamma would like to send me, but Pappa won't. He says he doesn't approve of girls' schools. . . . But perhaps if Lady Cecily would send you too, Clytie, he might change his mind. Wouldn't that be lovely. We could have a room together, and——"

"I should simply hate it—" burst out Clytie.

Rose flushed deeply, and, turning away from the glass, walked towards the door. As she left the room she said, in a cold offended voice, "Are you coming? I think tea's ready, and I promised Mamma to start home immediately after, because of its getting dark."

Clytie followed her to the schoolroom in silence, but feeling rather ashamed of herself. Why had she been such a beast to Rose all this afternoon? The reason was not far to seek. It was Saturday, and Mr. Buchan had asked her to come out fishing with him. She was to carry the landing net, and it was all heavenly, and they were just on the point of setting out, when Rose's visit spoilt everything. Clytie had wanted to explain to Rose that she must leave her, but Mr. Buchan had declared such a breach of hospitality impossible; and after a brief angry argument in the passage,—Rose meantime waiting all unconscious in the schoolroom—he had gone off to fish by himself. In such circumstances a quarrel had been unavoidable, and it was only Rose's sweet temper which had postponed it until now.

Mr. Buchan had not come in for tea, but Johnnie was already seated at the table, and to him alone poor hurt Rose addressed her conversation. "I expect you simply love riding, don't you, when you've got such a beautiful pony. I wish we had a pony," she was saying in a polite society manner when Clytie came in; to which Johnnie, with his mouth full, responded—"Aw no. Riding's all very well for swells like you and Clytie, but for a plain chap like me a traction engine's good enough!"

Almost before tea was over Rose was rising to put on her hat

LOVE IN A MIST

and jacket. "Don't trouble to come with me please. I prefer to go alone," she announced with trembling lips.

Clytie answered awkwardly, "Of course I'm coming as far as the stile".

They set out in an uneasy silence, which was at last broken by Clytie's blurting out that she knew she had been a beast, and she was sorry. Instantly mollified, Rose kissed her and took her arm; then proceeded to confide to her a great secret, namely that she had overheard Lady Cecily and Mamma discussing a plan of Clytie's learning German with Rose, from Fräulein.—"You mustn't say a word about it yet, as Mamma hasn't quite made up her mind; but wouldn't it be lovely? You'd come over to Langlea almost every afternoon then."

They parted very amicably at the stile, and Clytie strode back through the gathering dusk to Brocksden, in low spirits.

"—Why don't I like being with Rose as much as she does with me? She's far nicer than I am. But I don't want her to come again next Saturday, not one bit. . . . Why am I always having to do things I don't want, even when it's a holiday—and Johnnie does exactly what he wants all the time? Why was Mr. Buchan cross with me about Rose, when it was me that would have to stay behind, and him go off fishing just the same? . . . Why, oh why is it so despairingly difficult to get on with other people?—" she asked herself; splashing recklessly through the puddles, and kicking aside a stone which lay in her path.

3

Ploughing had begun, and in the mellow sunshine of the lingering autumn the fields were spread out like a great Hawke's blazer in wide stripes of golden stubble and brown earth. Hunting was in full swing, and once or twice a week the children and Pretty the butler stood on the front-door steps and watched Sir Peter in his pink coat riding away down the avenue on his grey mare. Johnnie might have accompanied him on Saturdays, but he was a timid rider, and, to his father's chagrin, generally found some excuse to stay at home. Clytie was not allowed to hunt, and Gavin had no horse, so they were fain to content themselves by following on foot when the meet was near. Presently the neighbouring lairds began shooting their pheasants, and you could hardly go out for a walk without being startled by the sound of guns, or finding yourself involved in a line of sportsmen. Being only the tutor, and a poor shot to boot, Gavin was never invited to outside shoots; but when

the Brocksden covers were shot, he was one of the guns, and the children got a whole holiday and acted as beaters. That Mr. Buchan must be a better shot than anybody else, was a foregone conclusion with Clytie, though her ingenuity was hard put to it to invent excuses as to why, in spite of a lavish expenditure of cartridges, hen pheasant and Cockyollibird alike rocketed past him unscathed. Gavin himself was mortified and discouraged by his conspicuous lack of success. "I always knew I was a bad shot," he would say to Clytie on the evening of such a day, "but I didn't know I was quite so rotten as this."—"It's that gun of Uncle Peter's," she would cry, "I'm sure it doesn't suit you ;" and her triumph was great at the next shoot when no less than three pheasants were so misguided as to fly into Gavin's line of fire.

One evening in middle December, when the autumn leaves were falling fast and the russet beech hedges made a sound like fluttering paper in the wind, there was an atmosphere of excitement and displeasure in Brocksden house. Mr. Buchan had beaten Johnnie! Such a thing had never happened before. Lady Cecily was furious. Sir Peter pretended to take it philosophically, and assured Johnnie's mother that such things had to be, and it would do the boy no harm. The servants, some of whom had heard poor Johnnie's outraged cries, thought it was a shame and the way Mr. Buchan favoured Miss Clytie beyond everything!

As a matter of fact it was not Clytie, but Lady Cecily herself who was the direct cause of the catastrophe. The day before, calling at the station for a parcel, she had discovered Johnnie's great secret, viz., that he had spent his last half-holiday in riding upon the engine of the good's train between Lammerton and the junction. Horrified at the idea of her precious son and heir having done anything so "dangerous and unsuitable," Lady Cecily hurried home and had a painful interview with Johnnie, who—finding her moved rather to protest than to admiration by the information that he had driven the engine "his own self for nearly three miles, and that Sandy the engine-driver said he was a rare one at stoking"—quickly passed from explanation to passion, and finally called his mother "an unkind beast," in a loud roaring voice. Neither persuasion nor violence having had any effect upon Lady Cecily's irrevocable decision that such a thing must never happen again, Johnnie got up next morning like a bear with a sore head. His brow was a thundercloud; he hated everybody, made no attempt to do his lessons, and took every occasion of answering back in a tone of sullen defiance.

His tutor who was sorry for him (and could see no reason why he should not occasionally go on the engine if it amused him so much) showed great forbearance; but by the middle of the afternoon, even he was nearly at the end of his patience.

The catastrophe itself came with appalling suddenness. Mr. Buchan, having for the third time requested Johnnie to sit up and pay attention, suddenly fixed him with a stern eye.

"You're eating something—" he said.

Upon this Johnnie, although as a rule the most truthful of boys, merely transferred the wedge of chocolate, with which he had been consoling the bitterness of his soul, from his tongue to his cheek, and answered with rude sophistry—"I'm not eating anything".

The lesson went on, and a minute later Gavin had occasion to go to the bookcase. Johnnie at once relieved his pent-up feelings by making a hideous grimace at his tutor's unconscious back, and Clytie's indignant eyes perceived a large lump of chocolate poised upon his protruding tongue. She ejaculated—"Little liar!" in a hissing whisper; and Gavin turned round just in time to see Johnnie propel the half-sucked chocolate from his mouth to Clytie's face. There was a moment of commotion, after which Johnnie found himself alone with his tutor, and reclining in an unaccustomed attitude across his knees. The passage echoed to his roars of astonishment and pain. Released with tingling nether man, he flew to his mother, who, gathering from his flood of sobs and complaints that "C-Clytie had c-called him a liar" and his tutor had whipped him—rang the bell violently, and desired Pretty to request Mr. Buchan kindly to come to her at once.

Their interview—punctuated by the sound of Johnnie's angry weeping in the next room—was short, uncomfortable and inconclusive. Gavin was calm and polite, and apparently unmoved by any sense of guilt. His brief explanation, that Johnnie had first lied to him and then spat in his cousin's face, was received with agitated incredulity.

"Dear Johnnie has always been the most truthful of children, ever since he was quite tiny. Clytie makes a point of teasing and irritating him. I feel convinced that——"

"Well, that was what happened anyhow," said Gavin, "and I can assure you, if he had been at school he would have been swiped for it."

"Well . . . it is most extraordinary. I cannot understand it. I have never known Johnnie do such a thing before. I am convinced there must be some quite simple explanation——"

"There is. He was in a thoroughly bad humour."

"—Indeed Mr. Buchan," . . . and for several minutes Lady Cecily discoursed upon the sweetness of her son's temper, his sensitiveness, and Clytie's unlimited capacity for upsetting him. . . . "So I must beg of you, Mr. Buchan, er—should such a thing occur again——"

"It won't happen again, Lady Cecily. Johnnie has lots of common sense."

"—Indeed I trust it will not. But it would be better in future I think,—that you should at least consult Sir Peter and myself, before er——"

Her sentence remained unfinished; and after waiting to hear if she had anything more to say, Gavin answered "Certainly" in a rather dry tone: and they parted in mutual dissatisfaction.

Gavin went out for a walk to recover his temper. When he returned he found the schoolroom deserted, and the school-room tea neglected upon the table. He sat there for some time, consuming bread and butter and reading the "Oxford Book of Verse". Then, having drained the teapot, and still no signs of Clytie or Johnnie, he went upstairs to his own room to work. . . . Dinner would be a bit trying, he reflected, as he ran up the narrow winding stair in the dark; he could imagine the melancholy displeasure of her Ladyship's attitude at table, and the awkward silences which would space his own and Sir Peter's efforts to converse as if nothing had happened. . . . His mother had been so pleased that he was to "dine down" at Brocksden—said it showed that they realised he was not an ordinary tutor; but faith! to-night he had rather be a governess, supping cosily by her own fireside. These thoughts passed through his mind like a flash, as thoughts do, and were switched off by his suddenly tumbling over somebody who was sitting on the top step.

"Who the devil?—Clytie! What are you sitting here for?"

"Nothing"—answered a choked voice.

"Well, you'd better get up then, and go to your tea. They'll have cleared away if you don't look sharp."

"I don't want any tea."

"Nonsense. Of course you do."

"No I don't. I only want to be left alone."

"Well—you can't sit here anyway. You'll get cold. Come along into my room."

Taking her by the arm, he led her along the short passage, and into his sanctum. A small wood fire was burning in the grate. Gavin pushed Clytie into a shabby but comfortable arm-chair in

front of it, turned up the reading-lamp, and taking his pipe off the mantelpiece began filling it. When he had got it going, he looked down, and asked—

"Well young woman—what's the matter with you?"

"Nothing"—muttered Clytie, keeping her head down so as to conceal her face, which was swollen and begrotten with weeping.

"Nothing can come of nothing. . . . Clytie. I believe you've been crying."

"Aunt Cecily says—says—everything was my fault. She says if I h-hadn't been there, it—it wouldn't have happened . . . and that I told you he was eating chocolate—and you know I didn't Mr. Buchan—I never did."

"No. You didn't."

"Aunt Cecily says she wouldn't have had me here if she'd known I'd be so spiteful—just like a girl! getting my little cousin into trouble—m-making constant mischief——"

She choked, and clasping her hands tightly together stared into the fire, the glowing embers dancing and swimming before her eyes. Gavin opened his lips to say—"My dear, your Aunt Cecily is a very stupid woman;" but thinking better of it, he continued smoking in a meditative silence. . . . In spite of herself the tears had begun to run down Clytie's cheeks and fall in a series of little splashes upon the leather arm of the chair.

"—Oh, I wish I could go right away from here—and never come back again—" she muttered. "It's not being scolded I mind, but—it's all so horribly unjust—that's what I c-can't bear. . . . And it's always the same wherever I am—except Standalone. Nobody seems to like me."

Furious with herself for crying before him, and full of desolation that he, whom she had been so sure would take her part, should continue smoking in silence, she sprang up and made towards the door, filled with a desire to rush out and be alone in the dark night.

"Come back, Clytie—" said Gavin, without turning his head. She hesitated at the door. "Come here. I want to ask you something." He looked steadily into her face, which was convulsed and scowling with her effort not to cry again; and demanded—

"Do I think it was all your fault?"

"No you c-couldn't, because you know it's not true."

"Do I not like you?"

Receiving no answer, he slipped his fingers under her chin and compelled her wild brown eyes to meet his. . . . "Do I not like you?" he repeated with a slight smile.

"I don't know—" she murmured; but her wet upturned face was like a rain-drenched garden, which is suddenly flooded with sunshine.

"You know quite well," he said at last, releasing her. "Silly little wench. . . . You're not quite friendless after all. Sit down there, and I'll read to you." And as he moved about by the book-case, pulling out one book here and another there, Clytie—who but an hour before had felt the forlornest thing on earth, sat, with her heart almost bursting with happiness.

4

It was not until the day after Christmas that the real winter set in with sleet and hail, which presently turned into a regular blizzard of snow. When it cleared, the park was an undulating sea of dazzling white. The gardeners had to climb up on to the roof with a ladder and dislodge the piled-up snow, which fell in an avalanche on to the front doorsteps. Clytie and Johnnie tied old tennis-rackets on to their shoes, and shuffled along through the soft snow endeavouring to believe that they were ski-ing. When the frost came, the joiner made them a small sledge, and they spent happy hours tobogganing down the nearest slope. Lady Cecily went about the house wrapped in an Indian shawl, with gloves upon her hands, and Sir Peter sombrely remarked, a dozen times a day, that this was the end of hunting for six weeks at least.

Presently Johnnie began to prophesy that the slight thaw which had set in portended more snow. "The roads'll be blocked again, and Mr. Buchan won't be able to get here," said he skipping about. Clytie looked through the window, and saw that indeed the sky was leaden and stray flakes of snow were beginning to fall. "Old mother Goose is plucking her geese. Horrid old thing, I wish she'd stop," she murmured. All that day and the next the snow fell silently and unceasingly, blotting out the outside world, and in the night coming in through Clytie's open window and forming a drift on the carpet. Johnnie began pestering his mother to send a wire telling Mr. Buchan to stop in London. "Nonsense—" said Sir Peter. "Time enough when the snow-plough can't get along the high-road. Besides he has three days yet. It may thaw by that time." Clytie silently blessed him for those words.

Alas! next morning it was as bad as ever. No post came in, no baker, no butcher. To all intents and purposes they were snowed up; and when, during a lull in the afternoon, Clytie with difficulty made her way down the avenue, she found the high-road

solid from hedge to hedge. Disconsolately she leant on the icy parapet of the bridge, and stared down at the Adder, which looked as black as its name gliding silently along between white banks and snow-laden trees. . . . When the thaw came, what a spate there would be. Vividly she pictured the wide expanse of red angry water with the trees standing knee-deep in it, flooding the low-lying places of the park, washing across the avenue, maybe carrying away the wooden bridge as it had done ten years before. . . . Let bridge and avenue go—if only it would thaw now, and thaw and thaw, so that Mr. Buchan could come back on Monday.

The sleeves of her jacket were spotted with fresh flakes. It was at it again, and the light was fading. With no spirit in her, she made her way back to the house, and was met in the hall by Johnnie, agog with news. The local train had been blocked between Lammerton and Gordon the evening before, and the passengers had to stay in it all night. It was still there. If this snow kept on, trains wouldn't be running again for a week. He kept harping on this theme, hopping about first on one thin leg and then on the other, until Clytie passed him by with a sour look.

At dessert that evening, when they all sat close together on the fireward side of the big dinner table, Sir Peter began repeating the old Scots jingle—

First it friz
And then it snow
And then it rained
And then it blew,
And then there came a shower o' rain,
And then it friz and snow again.
And then it came on sic a freeze
That all the bird's nebs stuck tae the trees.

The sound of the storm howling without nearly drowned his voice. At the first lull—"Well you young people," said he "this means at least a week's more holiday for you. But I daresay you'll bear up pretty well."

5

The thaw came at last, and with it Gavin, ten days after his time. Weeks of bad weather followed; and what with half-melted snow lingering in every hollow, brief frosts, and constant rain, the country-side was "sic a mucky gloar"—as Nanna put it—that grown-ups and children alike were confined to the immediate precincts of Brocksden. In spite of Dr. Johnson's dictum that no sensible man permits himself to be disturbed by the weather, it had a very perceptible effect upon the tempers of the household,

especially upon her Ladyship, who disliked cold as much as a Persian cat, and sadly missed the usual interchange of amenities with her neighbours. It is probable that those were factors in the increasing severity of her attitude towards her niece, but it must be confessed that Clytie, at this time, might have irritated even an affectionate mother. She was in wild spirits, and completely indifferent to the opinion of the whole world, always excepting Mr. Buchan. One stormy night she dressed herself in Johnnie's clothes, climbed out on to the roof, and boo'd in through the window of the maids, who were terrified and rushed down in their nightgowns to tell the footman that a burglar was trying to break into the house. Another day, when there had been a fresh fall of snow, Watkins returning from the village saw her young lady somersaulting wildly in a snow-drift.—"And it was just a mercy m'lady that it was me and not Pretty, for he always goes for his walk that very way."—"This," said Lady Cecily to Sir Peter, "is the result of having a girl of that age without a governess!"

All her aunt's nagging and scolding had less effect on Clytie than one grave glance from Gavin. Since the chocolate episode, she had decided that it was "no use trying to please Aunt Cecily, for she doesn't try to be fair to me, and always takes Johnnie's part". On the long dark evenings when the elders were at dinner, and it was not yet time for the children to go down to dessert, Johnnie and Clytie fell into the bad habit of quarrelling incessantly: and Johnnie's voice might be heard proclaiming in heightened tones—"Oh yes—you think you're going to queen it over everybody here, but I can jolly well tell you, you're not going to over *me*!" Sad to relate, they sometimes passed from words to blows—stinging slaps on the cheek, and on Johnnie's part a furious pulling of Clytie's long red hair. Lady Cecily, entering in the middle of such a combat, nearly swooned with horror, and not unnaturally blamed Clytie—for Johnnie had never behaved in such a way before she came! In answer to a long lecture, Clytie retorted—"All I can say is, you wouldn't feel very 'gentle and maidenly' yourself, Aunt Cecily, if Johnnie was simply swinging himself off the floor by your hair!"

Shortly after this Lady Cecily decided that it was quite time to put an end to Clytie's running wild between her lesson hours, and that in future she should go for a daily walk with Watkins the maid. Clytie was in despair, and Gavin, on hearing of the diotum, would have protested had he not been aware that his championship of Clytie on previous occasions had done no good. Why Lady Cecily was always so down on Clytie he could not imagine.

She seemed to him a most delightful girl, so original and plucky, and charming too in spite of her waywardness. Besides, he never found the slightest difficulty now in managing her.

Watkins actually took Clytie for three walks, after which, almost weeping, she threatened to resign her situation rather than continue. On the last occasion Gavin discovered her, bedraggled and heated after being led a will o' the wisp chase over field and burn, standing at the foot of a horse-chestnut tree on the high-road, vainly adjuring Clytie to descend. "Come down this minute, Miss Clytie. . . . Come down that's a dear. . . . Very well. I shall go home to my tea without you—that's what I'll do. My feet are soaking wet. I shall catch my death of cold if you keep me waiting any longer."

"If I come down, will you tell Aunt Cecily you won't take me walks any longer?"

"For shame, Miss. I shall tell her Ladyship what you say—that I will, if you don't come down this minute."

"You can go home and change your shoes, Watkins," said Gavin suddenly appearing from behind the hedge. "I'll look after Miss Clytie." He waited until Watkins, having relieved her soul with an outburst of complaint, had departed in the direction of Brocksden. Then looking up at the tree, through the upper branches of which a pair of black eyes were watching him, he said—"Come down".

Clytie immediately scrambled and slid to the ground, showing a good deal of white knickerbocker and a scratched brown knee as she did so.

"If you go on like this," remarked Gavin, "your aunt will get a governess to keep you in order, before you know where you are!"

6

The peel-tower at Brocksden had been the original "Hoose o' the Brocks" in old days, and there were still Brocks on the estate, descendants of the old lairds, but now quite ordinary tenant farmers, with nothing to console them for their decline of fortune except in the inward knowledge that the gentry to whom they took off their hats, Wyse, Ords or Maxwells, were upstarts of yesterday compared to themselves. The tower was overgrown with thick old ivy, up which the rats scrambled, and in which innumerable sparrows built their nests. The rooms were each the full size of the tower, square and low-roofed, and rather dark because of the thickness of the walls.

Gavin loved his room, with its shabby comfortable furniture, the mahogany bookcase filled with his own books, and the view through the narrow windows, of the Lammermoors on one side, and the blue line of Cheviot on the other. But he had never liked it so well as now, on those winter evenings, when Clytie sat on the hearth-rug, and the firelight shone on her hair making it gleam like a new copper penny. Neither of them dreamt that there was any harm in those evenings spent together; or, if Gavin had occasional suspicions that her Ladyship was hardly likely to approve, he suppressed them, because, as the months went by his affection for Clytie had grown—almost without his knowing it—from a seedling to a deep-rooted tree.

Thus it was that one evening Clytie, coming out through the green baize door which shut off the tower from the modern house, found herself face to face with her aunt, who started and gazed at her with an expression of shocked incredulity.

"Clytie! Why are you not in bed? And may I ask where you have been?"

"Reading"—said Clytie, turning very red, she knew not why.

"Reading?—in *Mr. Buchan's room*?"

"Yes, but I don't disturb him—indeed I don't, Aunt Cecily. I just sit by the fire and read, and he works."

"May I ask if you are in the habit of leaving the drawing-room on the pretext of going to bed, in order to sit in Mr. Buchan's room?" Lady Cecily's tone was icy.

"I never pretended I was going to bed, Aunt Cecily. I really came up to read. Mr. Buchan likes having me. Honestly he does. He says I don't bother him one bit——"

The consternation on her face, which had been so happy a minute before, might have softened the heart of anyone less sincerely conventional; but Lady Cecily was almost as shocked as if she had discovered an intrigue!

"This must never occur again. I—really, Clytie! A girl of your age—to *pursue* a young man—your cousin's tutor, up to his own room——"

"Not his bedroom, Aunt Cecily—only his study," cried Clytie, almost wringing her hands.

Lady Cecily drew herself up, and withered her with a glance.

"I am astonished and shocked—yes, shocked. If you have so little idea of what is seemly, it is quite time to make some other arrangement. . . . You are never to go to Mr. Buchan's room again. Do you understand?"

Clytie's face was on fire. Never to climb the stairs to that

beloved room again—never again to sit beside the fire with Mr. Buchan? . . . The weakest animals protect themselves with cunning when their existence is threatened. Checking the passionate defiance which sprang to her lips, she murmured—“Yes, Aunt Cecily”.

“And in future you will please remain in the drawing-room until your bedtime—for after this I really do not feel that I can trust you, Clytie.”

She passed majestically on, leaving her niece choking with rage, and with guile in her heart. So Aunt Cecily couldn't trust her? Very well. Neither she could! . . . For at least a week after this she never went near Gavin's room, but went to bed an hour before her time, in order that Watkins—who was once or twice dispatched to spy out the land—might be able to report her between the sheets. Not until her aunt's suspicions were entirely at rest, did Clytie again make an appearance in the turret room, where Gavin—who knew nothing of what had occurred, and who had missed her more than he cared to admit to himself—welcomed her with a silent nod of satisfaction.

Sometimes he sat at his table, his back turned towards her, and worked all the time she was there; sometimes he sat in the other arm-chair before the fire, and they both read with the two big and the two small feet stuck up against the same fender. The best times of all were when he read aloud to her, and she lay on the hearth-rug, listening and dreaming.

O what can ail thee knight at arms
Alone and palely loitering,
The sedge is withered from the lake
And no birds sing.

His voice rose and fell like the tones of a 'cello. The fire burnt with a steady red glow, shining upon the gold tooling on the backs of the books. The wind soughed in the chimney, and the ivy tapped with slender fluttering fingers against the window-pane. Gradually the room became full of ever-changing pictures . . . of “ages, long ago, Those lovers fled away into the night” . . . of jolly satyrs leaving their heath and yellow brooms, and cold mushrooms, to follow Bacchus, Bacchus on the wing . . . of English daffodils and an English poet on his way to evensong.

“Your turn, Clytie”—a voice would suddenly say, and the kaleidoscope of pictures would twinkle and vanish, and the room

appear again, with Mr. Buchan in the opposite chair, stretching himself and leaning forward to take his pipe off the table, and she, Clytie, sitting on the rug with the "Oxford Book of Verse" lying where he had tossed it, in her lap. . . . A joyful desire to choose a poem all by herself and read it to him, and a terror lest she should do it badly and make a fool of herself, would make her protest, half-heartedly.

"—Can't read aloud? Then it's time you learnt to. Fire ahead. I'm going to smoke."

Lazily he leant back in his chair, and blew rings, while Clytie nervously turned the pages, not knowing what to choose. At last, in a shy and breathless voice, she began—

Clerk Saunders and May Margret
 " Walked ower yon garden green
 And deep and heavy was the love
 That fell thir twa between.
 " A bed a bed " Clerk Saunders cried,
 " A bed for you and me."
 " Fie na, fie na," said May Margret
 " Till anes we married be."

Mr. Buchan had shifted his position so that his face was concealed. Clytie paused, feeling somewhat uneasy at the strange things which Clerk Saunders and May Margret said to each other; but supposing that as it was in the "Oxford Book of Verse" it must be all right, she read on. It is perhaps the most beautiful and certainly the most outspoken of ballads, and Gavin's expression grew very queer as he listened. Clerk Saunders did not wait for marriage, and was slain by May Margret's seven brothers as he lay asleep in her arms. They buried him at dawn; but the next midnight he stood by her window again.

It's hosen and shoon and gown alone
 She climbed the wall and followed him,
 Until she came to the green forest,
 And there she lost the sight of him.

Is there ony room at your head, Saunders,
 Is there ony room at your feet?
 Is there ony room at your side, Saunders,
 Whaur fain fain I wad sleep?

There's nae room at my head, Margret,
 There's nae room at my feet.
 My bed it is full lowly now,
 Among the hungry worms I sleep.

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Clytie's face had grown quite pale. She waited a moment, took a deep breath, and read on to the end—

And fair Margret, and rare Márgret,
And Margret o' veritie
Gin ever ye love another man,
Dinna love him as ye loved me. . . .

Then she shut the book, and sat staring into the fire.

"Thank-you, Clytie—" said Gavin, breaking the silence. "You're a clever little woman. Nobody could have read it better."

Clytie remained silent. Then suddenly and passionately she demanded—"Why did they kill him?"

Gavin hesitated, then answered simply—"I suppose they didn't think he had any right to be in her room at night."

"—There was no harm in it—"

"Perhaps not. But it wasn't the custom. People don't have the same room until they are married."

He glanced sideways at her frowning agitated face—she was entirely absorbed in May Margret's tragedy—and marvelled that, after fifteen years in the world, anybody could remain so innocent. When and how were the mysteries of life revealed to girls like Clytie, who were so jealously sheltered by mothers or aunts from the least suspicion of the truth? What would she feel when the truth burst on her? If Lady Cecily had her way, she would know nothing whatever until her wedding night. . . . Damnation! His little Clytie. . . . He was suddenly conscious that his face was burning.

"It's late, Clytie. You must go to bed"—he said. She paid no heed. In a tone which seemed to threaten the unseen gods, she exclaimed—

"If *you* died—I—I just wouldn't go on living."

"Little woman," said Gavin laying his hand on her red head—"One has to go on living, though much worse things happen than that."

"My dear Peter," exclaimed Lady Cecily, letting her hands, which held a letter, fall in her lap with a gesture of relief—"Fräulein Schroeder seems to be the very person we want."

It was five o'clock, and, as the July day was warm to sultriness, Lady Cecily had persuaded Sir Peter—who disliked all innovations

—to have tea under the great cedar tree on the terrace. Otherwise the situation was much the same as it had been on that day seventeen months before, when they had differed on the vexed question of Clytie's coming to Brocksden.

"Do put your paper down, Peter, and listen. It really is important, for I must write to Caroline by this evening's post."

"You can't. It's gone," said Sir Peter, without raising his eyes from "The Times".

"I mean the evening post dear—the post that catches the mail from Berwick."

"It doesn't catch it. The last train to Berwick goes at 5.35."

"But I assure you, Peter, I have constantly sent letters by the evening post."

"They haven't gone till next morning. Because there's no train."

"Of course if you say so dear. . . . But all the same I know there is, for I have constantly sent letters by it."

To the last observation, which was of the nature of an aside and not addressed directly to himself, Sir Peter only replied with a grunt. He threw down "The Times" however, and assumed a listening attitude.

"This is what Caroline says about her." . . . Lady Cecily unfolded the letter, and shaded her eyes with a plump white hand. "Er 'Fraulein Schroeder is a most capable and cultured person, and I can particularly recommend her for your niece if as you tell me she is rather backward. Fraulein is an excellent disciplinarian——'"

"Clytie isn't backward, Cecily. Why did you tell Caroline she was backward? On the contrary, for her age and sex, I consider her——"

"I consider her very backward, Peter, in almost everything which a girl of that age ought to know. Look at her French and music!"

"Well well—go on my dear. What else has Caroline to say about your Frollein Shudder or whatever her name is."

"Schroeder dear—Schroeder. Quite a good German name I fancy,—though not of course a von. . . . Er—she was for six years with the Vesey girl, Lord de Montmorency's daughter you know, and since then she has been with the Duchess of Westmorland. Before that I fancy she was with some noble German family; so you see, her references are unexceptionable."

"H'm. If she's the sort of governess who only teaches the children of the aristocracy, I don't see why she should come to us,"

observed Sir Peter, who had taken possession of the letter, and was skimming it without enthusiasm. . . . "Isn't eighty pounds a bit stiff too? Why we only give Buchan ninety. . . . However, this isn't my province. As we must have a governess, I leave it to you."

"That is settled then. I shall write to her by this evening's post," said Lady Cecily, with satisfaction. That she should at last get her way in this matter of having a governess for Clytie, was the only thing which reconciled her to the approaching departure of Mr. Buchan to India, and consequently of Johnnie to school.

"And now I suppose I had better tell Clytie—" she observed.
"What? doesn't she know yet?"

"Er—no. I thought it better not to tell her until everything was arranged. Indeed I begged Mr. Buchan to say nothing about it to her. It would only have led to needless discussion and—and that sort of thing"—for, even to Sir Peter, Lady Cecily was not prepared to admit that there could be any particular shock to Clytie in the departure of her cousin's tutor. That there was something "not quite suitable" in Clytie's feeling towards Mr. Buchan, she had for some time been aware; but, as he was going away to India, it did not now matter. She was resolved however to nip in the bud any continuance of it, by requesting Mr. Buchan not to correspond with her niece after he was gone.

"Well—you'd better tell her I think. Buchan's going in—let me see—less than a month now, and Clytie's fond of him," said Sir Peter rising. "Here she comes, Cecily. Tell her now"—and he moved away towards the house.

"Uncle Peter—" cried Clytie, running hatless across the lawn—"do say we may have some of the dining-room strawberries for tea. There are heaps of them, and Pretty won't let me take any!"

"You young people would eat me out of house and home if you were allowed," said Sir Peter gruffly. "When I was a boy I was thankful for gooseberries once a week." He winked slyly, and Clytie was preparing to rush back to the dining-room and triumphantly announce to Pretty "Uncle Peter says we can have them"—when her aunt's voice called to her.

"Clytie—come here. I er—there is something I must tell you." She hesitated, then said with emotion—"Our dear Johnnie is going to school."

Clytie's reluctant attitude changed to one of amazement.

"Oh Aunt Cecily—why?"

"Why indeed—" said Lady Cecily sighing. "You may imagine what it will mean to me, Clytie; but your uncle seems to think it necessary. . . . You see, dear, Mr. Buchan is going to India in

September. So we must have a governess for you; and dear Johnnie is too old now, too much of a little man, for petticoat government. Besides your uncle and Mr. Buchan both seem to think that a good preparatory school—" She paused, evidently expecting some comment, but as Clytie only stared at her with a face which might have been made of stone, she continued—

"Johnnie himself seems quite pleased at the idea of being with other boys. But it is most sad losing Mr. Buchan. However—I have just heard of a really nice governess for you Clytie,—a *Fraulein Schroeder*. She sounds a most delightful person. She has been——"

"I—I—I don't believe it!" cried Clytie, her voice almost rising to a shriek. Throwing up her hands with a frantic gesture, she whirled round, and fled away towards the house.

Gavin and Johnnie were sitting at the schoolroom tea-table hopefully awaiting the advent of the strawberries, when the door burst open and Clytie appeared.

"Where are the strawberries?" cried Johnnie.

Clytie shut the door, and stood for a moment beside it, unable to speak. "Aunt Cecily—Aunt Cecily—says—you're going away to India . . . but it's not true—is it?" In a choked voice she repeated—"Say it's not true".

"Of course it's true—" burst out Johnnie—"and I'm going to school, right away in England next term. You didn't know that; you couldn't, for Muddie told me not to say one word about it to you." His open countenance beamed with pride at having kept a secret, and with excitement at his own prospects.

Gavin, who had till now been silent looking at Clytie with a drawn face, checked a further burst of information from Johnnie by saying in a low voice—"Yes, Clytie. I'm going to India in September."

For a minute there was silence in the schoolroom, even Johnnie beginning to perceive from Clytie's face that there was something amiss. At last Clytie turned and began fumbling blindly for the handle of the door.

"Don't go away, Clytie. I want to explain to you—" Gavin rose, and went towards her. "Shut the door. . . . You see, Clytie—I was always going to India. You knew that, didn't you? Well now, the India Office has offered me a job out there—a good job, at a university—just what I've been hoping to get all along. It's well paid too; so I shall be able to help my mother which is very important, as she's not at all well off. . . . Besides—don't you see, Clytie, I couldn't refuse a permanent job like that just to

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stay on here a year more, could I? Johnnie would have to go to Eton anyhow in a year——”

“Of course I would. Boys always go to school,” chimed in Johnnie, unable to keep silence any longer. “Why Alfred Mappett and Jimmie Home went last Christmas, and they’re a lot younger than me. But I’m going too now, and——”

“And what if you are going to school?” broke in Clytie in a low fierce voice “—Boys aren’t everything are they? There’d still be me!—Why can’t you go on teaching me, even if Johnnie does go?” She gazed imploringly at Gavin, who with bent head stared moodily at the flower-vase in the middle of the table. “But of course—Oh I know—it’s all Aunt Cecily. She thinks girls don’t matter. . . .” A broken sound which was intended for an ironic laugh burst from her panting lips. . . . “Girls don’t need to be educated—only to have nice manners and look pretty so that somebody will want to marry them. . . . But I—I won’t have nice manners, and I’m not pretty, and—and—I don’t want to marry anybody.”

Her voice broke, and her eyes, unchildlike in their wild misery, were fixed on Gavin’s downcast face.

Johnnie, who had been bewildered by her vehemence, took advantage of the pause to cut in again. —“Well, but I was just going to tell you, Clytie—why can’t you listen instead of raging at me like that?—It’s all arranged about you. I’m going to school. And Mr. Buchan’s going to India. And you miss, are going to have a governess, because Muddie says it’s much more suitable for a girl.”

He winked at her mischievously, hoping to make her laugh, for the strange idea had occurred to him that Clytie was sorry that Mr. Buchan was going—so sorry that she had to shut her mouth in that queer way, and stare at the carpet, to keep from blubbing. This idea made him feel quite uncomfortable. With a notion of easing the situation, he observed in a sentimental tone “Ah yes,—it’s the end of the old days here. I shall never do my lessons at home any more. I don’t know if I’ll like it really. My father says——”

“It’s no good, Clytie. It’s got to be,” said Gavin in a whisper. He might have added—“I’m miserable too,” but he did not.

“. . . I expect the fellows there will be awful swells, who won’t want to have anything to do with a plain chap like me”—Johnnie was saying. The door closed. Clytie had gone out of the room.

On an afternoon some three weeks later, Gavin stood in his bedroom surrounded by his possessions, which lay in heaps upon the bed, the chairs and the carpet. It was as if his garments, in the dim seclusion of the wardrobe, had obeyed the injunction to increase plentifully and multiply. He was certain he had never had so many things as this. How to get them into his old portmanteau—once his father's—was the problem, for his mother had entreated him to pack for himself in order that nothing might be left behind. In his shirt sleeves, with a smudge of dust on his nose and his face red with irritation, he was now forcing them into the portmanteau for the third time. This time however he was doing it on scientific lines, boots in the corners, heavier clothes and racket at the bottom, shirts and dress-suit on the top. Unfortunately the result was precisely the same. The portmanteau refused to shut. In the agitation of this discovery a discreet tap at the door passed unnoticed, and Pretty entered the room just in time to see him despairingly leap into the recalcitrant portmanteau, and begin treading down its contents as a wine maker crushes the grapes.

"Oh—I wouldn't do that sir" he observed.

"This damned thing won't shut!"

"Now Mr. Buchan, you'd better leave it to me. Thomas would have done the whole packing this morning if you 'adn't sent him away. Pray allow me sir." He picked up Gavin's tail coat, and began smoothing out its creases with an expression of pain on his round benevolent face. "I'll just summon the under 'ousemaid to assist me, and we'll put them in for you in no time."

"I shall be uncommonly grateful if you can, Pretty, but it seems to me beyond the power of man," remarked Gavin. Pretty smiled pityingly and began carefully lifting the crumpled garments out of the box.

Gavin went up to his study where stood two empty wooden cases, which were for his books. The pictures he had already packed, taking great pains to fix them in, filling up the interstices with straw, and trying to persuade himself that the ominous sound of shivering glass when he fastened down the lid, must be imagination.

Lighting his pipe, he began taking the books one by one from their shelves and arranging them in groups upon the floor. All those by the window were to cross the sea with him. It took him some time to fit them into the largest box; but it was done at last,

and he straightened his back with a sigh of relief. Another box of books, to go home, was more easily packed. The scratch lot upon the hearth-rug were no good to him: he did not want to read them again, and they were not worth selling. He threw them into the paper basket, whence the housemaid presently fished them out, and with conscious virtue squeezed them in on the top of the box which was going to India.

There were still some forty books left on the floor, amongst them his school prizes, "The Waterbabies," and Tennyson, handsomely bound; the shabby old "Oxford Book of Verse," the "Essays of Elia," "Jane Eyre," the "Border Minstrelsy," most of George Eliot's novels, and five or six of Hardy's. He looked down at them with a meditative frown, and going over to the Indian box sought for and took out an old edition of "Wuthering Heights," and his well-beloved volume of Keats. "I can pick up another copy second hand in London," he thought. Kneeling down he began sorting them into two rows, poetry in this, fiction in the other; then tenderly—for every one of them was dear to him—he tied them together with two long pieces of string. Sitting down at his writing-table he wrote upon a label "Miss Clytie MacLeod," and tied it on. The window seat had a hanging cretonne cover; he put them behind it. . . . He must remember to tell Nanna to give them to her, when he was gone.

Everything was done, and it was nearly time to dress for dinner. Straw and paper littered the floor of his dear old room. The fireplace was filled with grey ashes and torn letters. The bookcase looked as empty as a gutted house. A blast of east wind came in through the window, fluttering the scraps of paper on the writing-table. It seemed to him as if it were turning into a haunted room in which nobody would live any more. Going over to the window he leant against the stone sill, and stood there for a long time, watching the shadow of the cedar lengthen upon the lawn as the sun sank gradually behind a bank of grey clouds which betokened rain upon the morrow.

9

Next morning the dogcart was ordered at nine to take him to Berwick, where he would catch the London express. This arrangement was perhaps the supreme token of Sir Peter's regard for him, since it was a rule of the Medes and Persians that all persons—with the exception of Lady Cecily—going South, must proceed to Berwick by the local train, although this meant changing half-way and waiting three-quarters of an hour.

Breakfast was at a quarter to eight, and a melancholy and embarrassing meal it was. Sir Peter's regret showed itself in various small outbursts of irritation, at the footman for putting marmalade on her ladyship's tray when he knew that she never touched it, at the cook for sending up coffee like dishwater, at Johnnie for heaping the contents of all three dishes upon his plate at once. Johnnie was embarrassed by a feeling that he was expected to feel profound grief at his tutor's departure. Now, although he was quite sorry—really he was! that old Buchan was going, still he knew he would be much sorrier if he was told it was all a hoax, and he, Johnnie, not going to school after all. Clytie uttered not a syllable during the course of the meal, and Gavin talked a little about his journey, to Sir Peter.

At a quarter to nine precisely the dogcart came round to the door, and the portmanteau and a discarded suit-case of Sir Peter's, which Pretty had commandeered for the overflow, were tied on to the back seat. Mr. Pretty himself stood on the doorstep and directed this operation. When it was completed to his liking he marched into the hall, and caused the gong to give forth a long-drawn melancholy bellow.

As the sound died away, the library door opened, and Sir Peter came out. Johnnie also appeared, with an uneasy grin on his face.

"Is the mare all right, James? No more puffiness in her off-fore?"

"It's as clean and fine as possible to-day, Sir Peter."

"You'll take her carefully, mind. Let her walk up the hills."

"Very good, Sir Peter."

Then Gavin came downstairs with his bag in one hand, and his shepherd's tweed plaid over his arm: Pretty positively ran to relieve him of those impediments.

"Good-bye, Pretty. I wish I could have you to pack for me in London."

Blushing a little, Gavin shook the butler's plump hand, and left a golden sovereign in it.

"Most kind of you, sir," murmured Pretty, without however dreaming of glancing at the amount. "We are all extremely sorry you are leaving us, sir. May I venture to wish you a pleasant voyage."

"Thank you, Pretty," said Gavin; then inquired—where was her ladyship? In the boudoir? And away he went to say good-bye to her.

It was a morning of alternate rain and sunshine, with scudding

clouds and an east wind as bitter as March. To keep himself warm Johnnie began jumping down the steps, and hopping up them again. "Tut!" said Sir Peter, "don't do that, you'll startle the mare." With some irritation, for he hated his horses to be kept waiting, he added—"He ought to be going soon. I hope your mother won't keep him."

Pretty glanced at his watch, and coughed reassuringly.

The door of the morning-room opened, and Lady Cecily's voice was heard giving vent to platitudinous but kindly farewells. . . . "It is such a long way to India too. . . . Your mother will miss you I feel sure. . . . Good-bye, Mr. Buchan—bon voyage—I do not know how we shall get on without you at Brocksden."

"Good-bye, Lady Cecily. You and Sir Peter have been awfully kind to me. Good-bye."

"Come along, Buchan.—But where's Clytie? Why isn't she here to say good-bye?" fussed Sir Peter. Johnnie raised his voice and shouted "Clytie—Cly-tie".

There was no answer.

—"I'll just go up"—murmured Gavin, turning back towards the stairs.

"There's not too much time by any means," remarked Sir Peter. "You should be off in five minutes, Buchan. It's always as well to have a certain amount of time in hand."

"What rot!—there's heaps of time," muttered Gavin to himself as he ran upstairs. He tapped at the door of Clytie's bedroom. "Clytie"—he called "may I come in, Clytie?" Receiving no answer he opened the door gently, peeped in, and saw that the room was empty. "Where is she?—Can she have gone up to my room—or——" He went quickly along the passage to the school-room.

The wind jerked the handle out of his grasp, and the door slammed behind him. The sun, streaming in through the window, shone straight in his eyes, and for a moment he thought that this room also was empty. Then he saw Clytie lying face downwards on the schoolroom table.

It was the old nursery table, a plain deal one, much inked and battered by hours of study. At the end where the tutor usually sat he had, very improperly, cut his initials one rainy afternoon; and Johnnie, with mischievous intent, had filled them in with red ink. It was beside that deep red G. B. that Clytie had seated herself to await the sound of the gong which would mean that it was time for her to go downstairs and say "good-bye".

It was five minutes now since that gong had sounded, but Clytie

had never stirred. Her face was pressed against the table and her hands gripped the uneven whittled edge so that every knuckle stood out white. She lay as still as if she had been dead, and Gavin too, by the door, stood quite still, looking at her.

At last he said—"Clytie. . . ."

Clytie raised her head from the table, and looked towards him in a strange unseeing way. Her face was ravaged with weeping. Gavin crossed the room and stood beside her.

"You didn't come down—to say good-bye to me, Clytie," he said.

"To say—good-bye . . ." repeated Clytie, in a voice of dull bewilderment—as one who is in great pain might listen to a joke.

"Yes," answered Gavin, speaking almost roughly, as if in a hurry to be gone: "I've got to go off now. The cart's waiting, so it's got to be good-bye. . . . Good-bye, my little girl. Good-bye, Clytie." He took her cold hand in both his, squeezed it convulsively, and turned quickly away.

The door closed behind him. . . . There was a moment of complete silence. . . . Then it opened again, and Gavin stood once more on the threshold, with his face as red as fire.

"I—just came back, to——" his voice broke. A harsh sound which was almost a sob, burst from his lips—"Clytie!"

Clytie started violently, looked up at him, and broke into a low despairing weeping. Gavin sat down on the table beside her, put both his arms round her, and held her as if he would never let her go.

Neither of them could say anything. . . . At last Gavin whispered—"Oh, for God's sake darling don't cry like that——"

Her face was pressed against his cheek which was all wet with her tears. Her sobs shook both of them. "I c-can't bear it"—she stammered, "I can't—I can't——"

Gavin's hold upon her tightened.

"But—I'll come back, Clytie," he said.

"If you go away—and leave me—I'll die. . . . I'll just die."

"I'll come back," repeated Gavin.

In the hall below, the gong rang again with an impatient menacing note. At the sound of it Clytie shuddered from head to foot, and her hands clasped themselves round his arm with such convulsive strength, it seemed nothing but main force would loosen them.

". . . They'll come and look for me"—said Gavin in a low voice. He got on to his feet, raising Clytie with him, until they stood, her hands clasping his arm, his arms round her body, looking at each other.

"Clytie," said Gavin, loosening her grasp and taking her hands in his—"I—I've got to go away and leave you. There's nothing else to be done. . . . I mean—it wouldn't be possible . . . you're only fifteen. I *must* go . . . now . . . but——"

Hardly knowing what he was doing, he was crushing her little brown hands mercilessly in his own.

"—But for God's sake, remember darling, I'm coming back."

There was a sound of voices calling him; then of feet coming up the stairs—"God damn them!" muttered Gavin. He drew her towards the door, and stood with his back against it, so that nobody could come in. Then his eyes grew dim, and his forehead was suddenly wet with perspiration.

"Oh my little woman . . . don't forget me altogether. . . . You're such a little—little girl still . . . and it's so long to wait." His face dropped towards hers, and their lips met in a long, long kiss, the first real kiss that either of them had ever known.

Somebody was coming along the passage.

Gavin let go of Clytie, and without looking at her again went quickly out of the room. A voice outside said "Sir Peter thinks you'll miss your train, sir, if you wait any longer". And Gavin's voice answered—"All right. I'm ready." Then there was a sound of feet going away—always away—along the passage, and down the stairs.

Presently in through the open window came more voices.

"Good-bye, my dear fellow. Good-bye. We shall miss you. . . ."

"Good-bye, sir. Good luck t'you——"

"Good-bye, Sir Peter. Good-bye, Johnnie old man," said a third voice. Then again, in a louder, insistent, note, which rose above the sound of the rolling of wheels upon the gravel, and reached the ears it was meant for—"Good-bye".

The sound of the wheels died away, but for a long time the regular trot trot of the mare's shod feet could be heard, as the dogcart bowled away down the avenue, out of the gate, and over the bridge. At last the distance swallowed it up, and there was no longer anything to be heard, though one listened ever so intently, except the trees sighing in the wind, and the sparrows twittering in the ivy.

PART II

“O Thou who did'st with pitfall and with gin
Beset the road I was to travel in,
Thou wilt not with predestination round
Enmesh me, and impute my fall to sin.”

CHAPTER IV

"O WOW! BUT HE WAS A BONNY YOUNG LADDIE"

I

NOW if this were a play Father Time should come in with scythe and hour glass, and tell us that five winters and four summers have passed since the last act; that Gavin is still in India, and Clytie at Brocksden; and that, though broad seas part the lovers, neither has forgotten the other. But this news he would have to impart in good rhyming couplets, or flowing blank verse, and your author has no gift for either. Moreover this is no play, but only a story of country life as it was when you gentle reader were younger by twenty years than you are now; and in everyday life, as you probably know, it is possible to remember without realising you are doing so, and to forget while believing you remember. Let us leave the story to tell its own tale therefore, and, since the scene has shifted from the school-room to the grown-up world, jump right into the middle of a tennis party at Langlea one afternoon in June.

"We shall be quite a party to-day," Mrs. Mappett was saying to the ladies who sat beside her looking on at the tennis. "I expect four or five of the officers from the depot, so we shall have plenty of gentlemen players. The Ords are coming too, and as it is so fine Lady Cecily is sure to drive over for tea."

"Dear Lady Cecily. I thought her looking rather frail in church yesterday," said Mrs. Home, a gentle kindly lady who loved her garden and her neighbours.

"Ah yes. If Sir Peter had listened to *me* he would have taken her abroad for the winter. But he cannot *bear* leaving Brocksden," said Mrs. Mappett, who in speaking of the Wysees always assumed an air of enjoying an intimacy which was denied to other people. Perhaps this dated from the time when the county hesitated to accept the new tenants of Langlea as "one of ourselves," until Lady Cecily came to the rescue: but I rather think it was Mrs. Mappett's way to believe herself specially intimate with the great of the earth.

"It was so unlucky Lady Cecily getting influenza just when Clytie had the prospect of a little gaiety; and she was so good about it the dear child—never a word of complaint about missing all the Edinburgh dances"—said Mrs. Home.

The ladies with one accord fixed their eyes upon a small hatless figure, which was at that moment making a wild rush to get a short ball.

"Is it necessary to wear such a *very* short skirt for tennis?" inquired Mrs. Maxwell who, having daughters of her own, had the right to be critical.'

"Dear me no, of course it isn't. I am sure Rose is as fond of tennis as anybody, yet you see her frock——"

"What a charming little dress it is, Mrs. Mappett. Dear Rose has such a talent for dressing," murmured Mrs. Home.

"Is that the new rector she is playing with? I have not met him yet," said Mrs. Maxwell.

"Mr. Milbanke, yes. Such a pleasant clever young man. Quite an acquisition."

"He does not seem a great tennis player however——"

"He must be out of practice then, for he says he has played a great deal in England. Well Rose—what is it?" for the sett had stopped abruptly.

"Oh Mamma," cried Rose plaintively, "*do* tell Roly and Poppet not to run on to the court in the middle of a rally. They keep on doing it——"

"Well dear, well—I am sure if you will explain to them where to stand. . . . Come my pets—come to Mamma."

"We're helping. We're picking up balls"—shouted Roly and Poppet.

"Very well—but you must keep a little further back dears, as Rose tells you.—They enjoy it so much, I haven't the heart to send them away," added Mrs. Mappett half apologetically.

"And so once more Lady Cecily's plan of that London season, which we have all heard so much of, has come to nought," observed Mrs. Maxwell when the tennis had begun again.

"Oh yes. The doctor said she must not attempt it this year"—answered Mrs. Mappett in a tone of not altogether sincere regret.

"Dear me, what a pity that is. What with the war and the queen's death and her aunt's illness, Clytie has hardly been out at all yet."

"It has been the same for all the girls, my dear Mrs. Home, until quite lately——"

"Yes indeed, Mrs. Maxwell, Rose too. I had quite resolved

to take her north for the gatherings this year, but, under the circumstances . . ."

Mrs. Mappett sighed meaningly, and rose to greet a new arrival.

"Poor Mrs. Mappett. It is rather upsetting for her so soon after the last"—murmured Mrs. Home. "—Er—when is it expected do you know?"

"In August I think. Number nine! A doubtful blessing! The colonel is *not* enthusiastic. He said to my husband the other day—'At one time it was every year, and I said to myself—the hotter the war the sooner the peace.—But I really thought we were through with it now!—'—Poor Colonel Mappett. He goes about looking quite injured, as if he personally had had nothing to do with it!"

"Oh Mrs. Maxwell—really!" cried Mrs. Home, laughing and blushing.

Several more guests had now arrived including the vaunted party of soldiers, which however consisted merely of a solitary subaltern on a bicycle. Poor Mrs. Mappett's face fell. She always persuaded herself that her parties alone in the neighbourhood attracted as many gentlemen players as ladies, but to-day it was difficult to keep up this illusion, as already six girls were sitting in a row beside the tennis court, all of them willing, nay eager, to play on the earliest opportunity. As a result of this "embarras de richesses," several precious minutes were wasted at the conclusion of each sett in deciding who should play in the next one, each young lady heroically protesting that she did not *in the least* mind sitting out again.

Presently a bell rang, and everybody began trooping towards the house—everybody that is to say except the three young men, who had hitherto, when not playing, remained together at a safe distance from the young ladies. At a word from Colonel Mappett they began with alacrity taking off their coats. The great event of the afternoon, the "mens' four," was about to begin. Alone of his sex therefore Mr. Milbanke, the new clergyman of the little English church on the hill, accompanied the ladies to the dining-room, where he was at first kept busy in handing round cups of tea. This gallant duty performed, he drifted towards the window seat where "Lady Cecily Wyse's niece" was sitting.

"Any room for a little one here, Miss MacLeod?" he enquired jocosely, and seated himself beside her. "I am so looking forward to your party on Tuesday.—Nothing I like better than a good hard game of tennis. But I have been so

occupied lately, working up the choir and what not"—he laughed—"I have not had much chance of getting into my game." He paused hoping for an assurance to the contrary; but Clytie—remembering his smashing service which never went over, his wild dashes to the net ever at the wrong moment, and the knowing way with which he put top cut on to his drives which forthwith soared over the shrubbery—could only murmur politely that she expected that he would soon get into it. The near proximity of his heated person was displeasing to her. Why did he always come and sit beside her? She wished he would go and talk to somebody else. Turning a little away from him, she pretended to be listening to Mrs. Mappett, who was holding forth upon her favourite topic, the inconveniences of living in an old house. "—You can have no idea, my dear Mrs. Home. That steep-winding stair—positively dangerous for the little ones. I fully expect one of them will fall down it one day and be killed. And then look at the other arrangements! every drop of water for our baths, boiled in the kitchen, and carried up by hand! Small wonder I can hardly get a decent servant to stay with me!"

"I have been doing my best to get the Rectory court into order, Miss MacLeod," said Mr. Milbanke. "I had hoped to be able quite soon to ask you to come and play tennis there, but now I begin to fear it will hardly be ready for another month. My predecessor used it for a chicken run!"

"Surely not?"

"Yes, indeed he did. But if that was all I had to do in the way of repairs, I should think myself lucky. The house and garden have been let down disgracefully. . . ."

He waxed eloquent upon the sins of his predecessor, a dear old man of whom everybody had been very fond. Vainly did Clytie endeavour to slip away from him in the general move from the house to the lawn again. He remained obstinately by her side, and presently, without quite knowing how it had come about, she found herself reluctantly accompanying him towards the garden, which—as in most Scotch places—was at some distance from the house. To her relief, the voice of Mrs. Mappett was raised to stop them.

"Mr. Milbanke . . . Mr. Milbanke!"

Mr. Milbanke pretended not to hear, but as his companion with alacrity turned back, he was obliged to do the same.

"We were just going to see the rose garden, Mrs. Mappett——"

"Oh were you? And very nice it is too—all Colonel Mappett's

work you know, for we can only afford to keep one gardener, and with that great garden he has more on his hands than he can well manage. But now Mr. Milbanke you are wanted for tennis. Rose told me to——"

"Really, Mrs. Mappett, I have played so much already, I think it is time for me to give way to others."

"Oh not at all. Besides the other gentlemen are at tea, so they cannot manage without you."

"I suggest that the young ladies should have a four," said Mr. Milbanke gallantly.

"I assure you they wouldn't like that at all : they much prefer a mixed double. Here is Miss MacLeod who makes quite a favour of coming over to play with Rose and the younger girls."

Mr. Milbanke began to have a feeling that he was being exploited, for why should he play with Miss Mappett when he did not want to. With an effort to combine playful firmness with politeness, he said "Unfortunately er—I am already engaged to show Miss MacLeod the garden".

"Clytie—the garden? Why she has seen it a thousand times," cried Mrs. Mappett raising her eyebrows, while a new idea passed through her mind. Her suspicion was confirmed when Mr. Milbanke, realising further resistance to be impossible, turned his defeat into victory by requesting that Miss Clytie should be his partner. Poor Mrs. Mappett, who had just been opening her lips to tell him that he was to play with Rose again, was completely nonplussed : and although Clytie at once said she did not want to play, there was a veiled defiance in the Rector's glance which obliged Mrs. Mappett, sorely against her will, to second his request. She sped them off to the court together and returned with a heavy step to her chair, telling herself that tennis parties were really becoming too much of an effort for her.

Clytie however remained firm in her refusal to play, and escaped to the rose garden ; along whose now deserted paths she wandered, sniffing in the fragrance with much contentment.

2

As summer, with falling rose leaves and seeding grasses, advanced to autumn, it became no uncommon occurrence to behold the clerical coat and black straw hat of Mr. Milbanke bicycling up the Brocksden avenue. His frequent visits were a sore affliction to Clytie, who became an expert in springing out of windows and flying into the shrubbery at the sound of the front door bell. Sir

Peter, who was once or twice obliged to entertain the uninvited guest, grew restive, and said that if this went on somebody would have to give the fellow a hint. Lady Cecily alone found some enjoyment in his visits. After all he was a young man, and a clergyman of the Church of England. As a husband for her niece, he was of course out of the question; yet, just as when the regiment swings down the street it is preceded by a throng of ragged urchins and loafers, so might this mild clerical admirer be the forerunner of better things.

"I am afraid I come as a beggar to-day, Lady Cecily. Next Sunday is the harvest festival——"

Mr. Milbanke spoke in the slightly clerical tone into which he unconsciously fell when discussing church matters;—I say unconsciously, because he often told Clytie that a parson should be as other men were, able to shoot, dance and play games without in any way lowering his holy office. "Muscular Christianity, Miss Clytie" he would remark, feeling rather original as he said it. "That's what the Church needs nowadays to infuse new blood into her venerable veins."—To which Clytie answered that it sounded a disagreeable operation.

"Oh yes, the harvest festival. And you want some things from the garden to decorate the church?" said Lady Cecily handing him a cup of tea.

"I must confess to having cast envious eyes on those very fine nectarines on the garden wall. I thought, perhaps, a few laid round the font——"

"Charming."

"I noticed too—it is impossible not to break the tenth commandment when one goes round your garden, Lady Cecily, ha! ha! —I noticed the fig tree is covered with fruit this year. Do you think—just a few branches, for the base of the pulpit? There is something very symbolical in the fig tree."

"Yes indeed, the Garden of Eden and er—the fig tree that was cursed." . . . Lady Cecily's tone was distraught, for the door behind Mr. Milbanke had opened and a face appeared which put out its tongue, and vanished again. . . . "Such an unsuitable, childish thing to do—and to a clergyman too! He might easily have seen her in the glass," thought she. . . . While they continued to discuss the harvest festival, Sir Peter maintained a grim silence, and drank his tea with a sucking noise. In response to Mr. Milbanke's hope that he would be in church on Sunday (Sir Peter always went to the Kirk except on special occasions, when he accompanied Lady Cecily) he replied "No," adding that he had

never found the presence of decaying vegetation conducive to devotion.

"Perhaps I might go to the garden, and see what our good Wilson is prepared to give me?" Mr. Milbanke presently suggested, when he had drunk three cups of tea and consumed innumerable scones, in the vain hope that "Miss Clytie" would make an appearance.

It was one of those serene evenings which September brings to Scotland. Rosy clouds hovered above big Cheviot, and Mr. Milbanke also felt suffused with rosy longings. It was now about six weeks since he had definitely made up his mind to propose to Clytie, and although at first this decision had been influenced by the vision of his family's delighted astonishment when he announced to them his engagement to an Earl's grand-daughter, such ulterior motives had long been driven into the background by the machinations of nature, who was resolved that the Rector should take a wife to his bosom as soon as possible. His feeling for Clytie was as genuine and uncontrollable as it would have been for any other young woman upon whom circumstances had focussed it at this time of his life. He was at once uxorious and sentimental, and having always been greatly admired in his family circle, he tried to persuade himself that his wooing must be ultimately successful. But he was unable to overcome a stammering embarrassment which overwhelmed him on the rare occasions when he succeeded in being alone with his innamorata. To-day, being swollen with confidence and tea, he was resolved to break down the foolish reserve which still separated them from each other; yet his heart beat more violently than he wished, when he caught sight of a lavender print dress hiding behind the hedge of sweet peas.

"Aha! Miss Clytie—aha! found at last!" he ejaculated, and, with smiling mouth but timid eyes, began skipping nimbly over the rows of cabbages towards her.

"How do you do" said Clytie.

"You are picking sweet peas? Delightful. Do let me help you" said Mr. Milbanke, longing to add gracefully "sweets to the sweet" but not venturing to do so. He adjusted his pince-nez, picked three sweet peas with very short stalks, and handed them one by one to Clytie, experiencing that agreeable tingling sensation which the French call "*un frisson*" each time that his fingers touched hers. Hardly knowing what he was saying, he began telling her a funny story—which she had heard before—about a little boy and his prayers. He was even fonder of humorous stories than of apt quotations, and was wont when he came to the point

to explode with laughter, and then repeat it all over again. Clytie laughed politely, and standing on tiptoe tried to reach a spray which had raised its rosy head above its brothers. Mr. Milbanke sprang forward to help her.

There was a moment's silence. Then Clytie drew away her hand with a look of amazing haughtiness.

"You forget yourself"! she said—in a voice which she afterwards realised to have been an exact imitation of Lady Cecily's when she dismissed the impertinent under-housemaid.

Poor Milbanke flushed purple, averted his eyes, and bleated in agitation—"I—I beg your pardon. . . . I couldn't help it—you looked so sweet."

He would have said more, much more, for having taken the first plunge what folly to swim back to the bank: but he immediately found himself alone, with the sweet peas scattered at his feet.

Ruefully he bent to pick them up, deploring his own impulsiveness, yet feeling the primitive instinct of the male stirring beneath his clerical waistcoat. She might escape him now, but to-morrow it would be his turn. Dear little girl—how modest how feminine had been her flight, and how carefully Lady Cecily must have brought her up! . . . "She evidently thought I was trifling with her. She was almost in tears. And now I have frightened her away. Oh damn!—I mean, why didn't I control myself more. But how could I? I love her—I love her"—he muttered, beginning to pace passionately to and fro on the unoffending sweet peas.

That night he scarcely slept, tossing and turning, lighting the candle to read Swinburne, putting it out again and lying gazing into the darkness with an almost gloating expression on his rosy face. Next morning dawned cold and grey. By breakfast it was a steady drizzle, and by lunch time the rain was so heavy that Cupid himself might have hesitated to fly abroad. But the intrepid Mr. Milbanke, after waiting until four o'clock in hopes that it would clear, donned his new waterproof, got out his bicycle; and—like froggy that would awooing go—off he went.

He rode vigorously through the mud, his face red with exertion and wet with rain, and in his mind the inspiring reflection "None but the brave deserve the fair". Unhappily, coasting down the hill above the Brocksden gate, he had a nasty side slip, fell in a puddle, and was obliged to return home crestfallen and bedaubed.

In the sloping glade on the other side of the river where the primroses grew in spring, the foxgloves were now in flower; and here, under the shade of a wide-spreading beech tree, Clytie lay on the grass, absorbed in "Wuthering Heights".

It is perhaps time to give the reader some idea of our heroine's appearance at the mature age of nineteen to which she has now attained. That she was a pretty girl even Nanna could not pretend; her friends described her as "interesting looking" or "picturesque," her enemies as "plain". Personally I never could see that Clytie was plain, although her brown face and straight black eyebrows contrasted oddly with her red hair. Her nose was certainly somewhat irregular in outline—but what face has character without an individual nose? The ladies of the neighbourhood considered her figure bad, and it was perhaps rather broad for her height which was but five foot two; but her head was poised upon her neck like a flower on its stem, and her bosom was softly rounded. At a garden party or a dinner, when she was shy or bored, she would shrink into complete insignificance, a figure at which nobody would cast a second glance; but catch her alone among the flowers or beside the river, and you would carry away with you the memory of a creature with a "wild and woodland air" which was not quickly forgotten.

She looked very young, little more than a child; but an interested observer would have guessed that it was a child who had at one time suffered, and that the reserve of her expression had been adopted as a defence against the outside world. Her eyes were so dark as to be almost black. At the moment of which we are writing they were tense with concentrated fury, and her hand gripped the innocent grass as if it were an enemy's hair. She had come to the scene in which Heathcote entraps and beats the younger Catherine.

As she read, the gently murmuring river, the song of the black-birds and thrushes in the fine old beech trees, all the serene beauty of the Lowland country-side had ceased to exist for her; and in its place she was surrounded by bleak moorland across which the north wind moans, with a bare grey stone house standing so far from its neighbours that wolfish man could do the blackest deeds, and none to know or succour. The torrent of the story swept her away; but all the while, in the back of her mind, ran another story, the same and yet different; in which another Catherine—who bore

a marked resemblance to herself—encountered Heathcliffe in a very different manner; defied him—outwitted him—and escaped to freedom.

At last the book slipped from her fingers, and lay face downwards on the grass. Catherine had consented to the forced marriage. Her father was dead. Already, in the inexorable grip of fate, her character had begun to deteriorate. Soon she would be the graceless hardened creature of the first chapter. It was no use pretending any more! . . . A foxglove curtseying in the gentle breeze, caught her attention. The corners of her lips began to tilt whimsically upwards. It was exactly as if it was trying to say—how do you do—. In the tree above her where the thrush was singing, the sober green of the beech leaves was touched here and there with a gleam of russet and gold. How green the grass was in the sunshine, after yesterday's rain. Compared to it the Adder looked as black as ink, and the ragworts and dandelions along its bank were like the yellow in a child's paint-box. . . . Gradually her eyes became pools of dreamy absorption. In many ways changed since her rebellious childhood, Clytie was in one thing at least exactly the same—she was still an inveterate dreamer. What form those day dreams took, I am unable to tell you, for she never spoke of them to anybody. But this I know—that one memory, one figure only, was the centre round which they revolved, and that, without them, the romance and significance of life would all have vanished for her.

"She is thinking of me!" flashed through poor Mr. Milbanke's mind, as a gap in the trees allowed him to catch a glimpse of her face, with a look on it which he had never seen there before. With the elaborate precaution of one who tiptoes handkerchief in hand after an escaped canary, he stole nearer and nearer.—But square toed clerical boots are not adapted to the trail. A branch cracked under his foot. Clytie started and turned towards him the frowning face of the disturbed dreamer.

"I—I saw your white frock as I was coming up the avenue . . . Miss MacLeod—Clytie! I think you know what I have come to tell you? I think you must have guessed——"

Clytie had risen to her feet. Her face was scarlet. How embarrassing—how awful that he should have found her here alone. He had obviously come to apologise for his horrid behaviour in the garden . . . but she did not want him to apologise. She did not want even to think of what had happened. She simply wanted to forget about it—and never, never be close to Mr. Milbanke again!

"Please don't talk about it. . . . It d-doesn't matter," she stammered.

"It matters more than everything else in the world to *me*."

Oh dear! he was so near her now that his face seemed almost touching hers. What exactly he said after this Clytie never knew, but his meaning was perfectly clear, and so alas! was the sincerity of his emotion, in spite of his moist eyes and awkwardly gesticulating hands. The ridiculous Milbanke was at this moment transformed into a man palpitating with passion and tenderness, and convinced that she not only understood but shared his feelings!

"Oh, please don't. . . . Mr. Milbanke—stop. I am going back to the house."

"But Clytie, I love you. I love you, my darling."

"I am sure you don't."

"I only want you to say one word—one little word, my darling."

Darling! Mr. Milbanke had twice called her darling! It was impossible to pretend any longer that nothing had happened. "I can't . . . I'm most dreadfully sorry . . . but it's impossible. I—don't love you in the least" she exclaimed, drawing away from him.

Mr. Milbanke's face became first bewildered, then very red, then gradually completely different and terrifying. "You can't mean that"—he muttered in a low fierce voice; then suddenly crying "—but you don't mean it—of course you don't!" He flung his arms round her, and, pressing her to him, kissed her violently. As he exerted his strength to still her furious struggles, he seemed to throw off the nightmare of defeat which had for a moment overwhelmed him. His triumph was short-lived however. Clytie broke away from him, and rushed across the grass towards the wood. With bounding pulses and streaming coat tails (the clergyman for the moment engulfed in the primitive male) he pursued her; but fleetest of foot she would have escaped had she not tripped over the root of a tree. She fell, and burst into tears.

Her distress recalled Mr. Milbanke to himself. Ashamed, and alarmed at his own unexpected violence, he stood above her in the silence of extreme consternation. At last, bending down, he stammered—"Forgive me. My darling, did I hurt you? I-I-I—Forgive me, Clytie."

"Don't—touch me. I hate you"—she sobbed, thrusting away the hand which was timidly caressing her shoulder.

"You know you don't mean that. You can't mean it.—Oh!

what a fool I am! But it was my love was too strong for me. Clytie—be generous——”

“G-o away. Go away.”

“I was a brute I know—but I love you.” Mr. Milbanke had grown pale, and though he still held her hand to prevent her from escaping, he did not venture to caress it. “And I swear to you, Clytie, that if you’ll marry me——”

“Marry you!” almost shrieked Clytie tearing her hand away and leaping to her feet. “Marry you? Oh! will nothing make you see that I simply can’t *bear* you?” Carried away by a wave of extreme physical repulsion, she cared nothing for the cruelty of her words. Averting her eyes from his imploring face, she told him—“I think you’re *horrible*. I hate to be touched by you.”

He understood now. Poor Mr. Milbanke. His face burst into patches of red and white. Perspiration stood on his forehead. His trembling lips found difficulty in framing the words—“Do you mean—you refuse me?”

But Clytie had turned, and as fast as her trembling legs would carry her was walking away from him.

“Stop—listen. It’s impossible,” he cried, pursuing her and barring her path. “Even if I forgot myself for a minute, you can’t treat me in this way. If you hadn’t encouraged me——”

“If you think I encouraged you——”

“You see. You can’t deny it. She can’t deny it!” Beside himself with mortification and wounded passion, he seemed to appeal to the beech trees, which, unconcerned with the strife of the mortals at their feet, placidly waved their branches in the afternoon sunshine.

Seeming to be almost out of his senses he strode on in front of her, muttering to himself, striking his forehead, gesticulating furiously. Wilson the gardener would have been hard put to it to recognise his “affable joky sort o’ gentleman” at this minute. Every now and then he paused to hurl back some fresh reproach at her. “And you pretend you didn’t expect it! Why was I made so welcome by your aunt if . . . Why were you so ready to talk to me at all the parties?” Every instance of his own pertinacity in wooing seemed to him now a fresh proof of her heartless duplicity. His pitiable condition shocked Clytie into forgetfulness of her own outraged feelings. It seemed a sin to behold the helpless nakedness of his emotions—but good heavens! why didn’t he leave her? She walked steadily on, her eyes fixed on the ground, feeling very miserable.

At last Mr. Milbanke's exclamations and reproaches died away. In silence he stood quite still in the middle of the path with his back turned towards her. Then hearing her feet stealing away from him back into the wood, he turned and came slowly after her.

"Miss MacLeod——"

Sorely against her will, something impelled her to pause.

"There is nothing left then except—to go away," he said with a cold dignity which contrasted pathetically with his red eyes and wet cheeks. "My—my bicycle is in the avenue. If you will walk so far with me I—" To her horror and despair sobs choked his voice. In a high forced tone he ended—"I will take myself out of your life".

Side by side in a wretched silence they crossed the wooden bridge, and the park, until they came to where, against the wire fence, lent his bicycle.

Its back tyre was flat. He blew it up, pinching it every second to see if it would carry him. At last it was tight. He grasped the handles and put his foot on the step.

"Mr. Milbanke—it's no use saying I'm sorry; but I promise you I'll never tell anybody," faltered Clytie.

To her dismay he put his foot on the ground again, and stood looking at her with his face working. At last he answered bitterly—"You led me on. You know you did. . . . But I'll try to forgive you"; and, mounting his bicycle, he rode away down the drive with the tears running down his face.

CHAPTER V

THE VISIT

I

THE course of years, and Johnnie's frequent absences at school, had increased Clytie's importance in Lady Cecily's eyes. It seemed now as natural to have her at Brocksden as it had once seemed the reverse. She had imperceptibly glided into the position of a daughter in the house; and although, like not a few mothers and daughters, they disagreed on many points and frequently got on each others' nerves, they had become very fond of each other.

Ever since Clytie, at the age of eighteen, had reluctantly consented to put up her hair, Lady Cecily's great desire had been that she should marry well; and she was already beginning to feel uneasy that she should nearly have reached the age of twenty without having (as far as she knew, for upon the Milbanke affair Clytie had kept silence) had even one offer. Had Lady Cecily been French she would probably by this time have arranged a suitable match, even though it meant providing the money necessary to make up the required "Dot". As it was she was obliged to content herself with inviting as many eligible young men as possible to Brocksden. . . . Unfortunately, it was easier to invite them than to get them there! The Wyse's circle was mainly composed of elderly country squires, their wives, and their daughters; and the Brocksden shooting was not good enough to attract the kind of bachelor Lady Cecily required. The few marriageable men of the neighbourhood were friendly enough, but nothing more. Lothianshire was full of well-bred pleasant pretty girls, of marriageable age, but with little apparent prospect of changing their estate. There were the Maxwells, the Crawfords, the Mappetts, and a dozen more; and, although Rose had actually received a proposal from the last mud student but one at the Castle farm, on the eve of his departure to fruit-farm in Canada, most of them had never even had an admirer.

"But how do girls get married now-a-days? How can one expect them to marry?" Lady Cecily sometimes reflected sadly; and was reluctantly driven to the conclusion that if young ladies could not find husbands at home, they must e'en seek them abroad. With a delicate evasion of the main issue (for many thoughts occupy the minds of wives which they do not directly impart to their husbands!) she one day observed—

"I have been thinking, Peter, that—as I am not strong enough to take her about as much as I should like, it would be a good plan for Clytie to pay more visits."

"H'm! Can't see that her visit to the Castle was much of a success. Nor yet to the Dunlops—if the object of visiting is enjoyment," said Sir Peter.

Lady Cecily flushed with indignation as she remembered the despairing telegram which she had received from Clytie on the third day of the last named visit—"Heavens' sake wire saying I must come home at once!"

"That—er—foolish shyness would soon wear off if Clytie went about more. It is a great disadvantage to a girl to live in a quiet neighbourhood like this all the year round; and—I do hope Peter you are not going to encourage her to——"

"To be content at home?" queried Sir Peter, who hated visiting himself, and disliked missing any face out of his small domestic circle, even for a week.

"Really dear, I sometimes think you wilfully misunderstand my meaning! . . . Nobody can be fonder of Clytie than I am,—and if I see her faults, it is because I have her true welfare at heart. After all there is an eccentric strain in the MacLeods. It is a real misfortune for a girl to be—er—unlike other people."

"All right my dear. She seems to me very well as she is.—However, if you think otherwise. . . . But I don't see how she can go visiting if nobody asks her!"

"Of course I do not mean that. I only mean that the next nice invitation she receives, I am resolved it shall be accepted."

It was not for some time that Lady Cecily had the opportunity of putting this resolution into effect. September and October passed without anybody manifesting the least desire to have Clytie to stay with them. The misty month of November was half-way through before Lady Cecily was made happy by receiving a letter from an old friend on the other side of the border, inviting herself, Sir Peter, and their niece, to spend ten days with them, and accompany them to a ball. Sir Peter promptly refused to do anything of the sort, and Lady Cecily's health made it unwise for her to

undertake the journey; but that Clytie must and should go was a foregone conclusion, and a letter was despatched by return of post, accepting on her behalf.

"I expect I'll hate it, Aunt Cecily—all by myself among a lot of *English* people!"

"Nonsense, dear.—The Montgomerys are old friends of ours, and, I have no doubt, if you make yourself agreeable, that they will ask you there again."

"Then I must be as rude and vulgar as I can!" muttered Clytie.

"I think I will come up to your room now," went on her aunt, who had not caught her remark, "and consult with Watkins about your clothes. It is quite delightful they should have asked you!"

"Who'll be there?" asked Clytie, with a tingling remembrance of how woefully out of it she had felt at the Castle, among the smart young married women from London, and their attendant swains.

"Mrs. Campbell of Auchentyre and her daughters—Mrs. Montgomery mentions them specially. . . . Nice well-bred girls—but *not* pretty. And you may be sure the Montgomerys will take a number of young men to the dance, for the son is in the Cavalry, so he will be sure to bring some of his brother officers. There is a daughter too, Ella . . . but she must be over thirty now, so she is hardly a girl. However she is a nice creature."

"But supposing nobody wants to dance with me at the ball,—and I don't see why they should," murmured Clytie, whose feelings, however, somewhat belied her doleful tones. She would be glad to get away from the neighbourhood of Mr. Milbanke, even for ten days; for although, since his refusal, he had held coldly aloof from her at the various parties, and even paid marked attentions to any other young lady who happened to be near him, Clytie was too often conscious that his angry and miserable eyes were fixed upon her; while to sit in the front pew at church with the pulpit directly opposite, was every Sunday a more painful ordeal.

A certain sense of adventure exhilarated her during the sixteen-mile drive through the Merse, and across the Tweed into that, to her, unknown country, England. The familiar Lammermoors had dwindled to a grey mass on the northern horizon, and big Cheviot had come so near, she could almost see the russet bracken on its slopes, when she arrived, to become at once the victim of a ravaging shyness, which made it an effort even to reply suitably to her hostess's formal but kind inquiries about her "dear aunt". There was nothing very formidable however in the small party of

ladies who were sitting round the tea table in the great hall. Two thin nose-y girls who were introduced as the Miss Campbells were quietly friendly to her; while Ella, the daughter of the house, a short stout person with a small shining nose and thick black eyebrows set above childlike eyes, was kindness itself, plying her with a succession of scones and cakes. So Clytie, who was always shy when she was hungry, began to recover her self-possession.

"I cannot think why Nettie is not back yet," said Mrs. Campbell, an erect and handsome woman with white hair and bright severe eyes. "It is quite a short distance to the village, and what she had to do for me would take her no time. Of course I do not know about Miss Mackie's purchases."

"She may have stopped at the rectory for tea," suggested Miss Montgomery.

"She would scarcely do that without my leave, and accompanied by a stranger," said Mrs. Campbell, raising her eyebrows.

"I expect Miss Mackie had lots of shopping to do. She seemed so set on going too," murmured Janet Campbell.

"Nettie knows I should not wish her to be out so late. Why it is quite dark. I shall have to scold her about this, though I confess it is very unlike her." From Mrs. Campbell's tone Clytie inferred that the unknown Miss Mackie was not a favourite.

Presently the males of the party began to appear, in the form of Clytie's host, an elderly gentleman with a somewhat pompous manner, and a younger man of the name of Nisbet, rather moth-eaten in appearance but quietly agreeable. Tea was nearly over before there was a bustle of arrival in the outer hall, and two young men in mud-bespattered pink coats entered, the shorter of them calling "Poached eggs on toast, James—and bring 'em quickly will you?"

"My son Arthur—Miss MacLeod," said Mrs. Montgomery, and Clytie was favoured with a mere bow. The second hunter was introduced as Captain Le Mesurier. Seating themselves at the table they began describing the run, Captain Montgomery waxing enthusiastic in praise of his mare Stella, who had, he assured the company, "been jumpin' like a bird, and came in at the death as fresh as paint!"

In the general animation which followed their arrival, Clytie was able to study the new-comers at her leisure. She preferred the other man to the son of the house. He was older and quieter, and his manners seemed excellent; but the rather bored composure of his blue eyes, and a something of distinction about his

appearance, made her suddenly and disagreeably conscious of her own complete insignificance. Shyness again took possession of her, and it was a relief when Ella suggested she should come upstairs and see her room.

Half-way up, they heard the front door bell ring.

"That must be Nettie and Miss Mackie. What *can* they have been doing all this time," said Ella, pausing and looking over the banisters. Clytie heard Mrs. Campbell exclaim "At last!" in a tone of mingled relief and displeasure, as a very young girl—whose small sharp face and little black eyes reminded her of a water rat—scuttled apprehensively into the hall. She was followed by a slender much be-hatted lady, who walked slowly and gracefully across the oak parquet, evidently enjoying the consciousness that everybody was looking at her.

"That's Miss Mackie.—Do *you* think she's so pretty?" whispered Ella.

Clytie returned no answer, but with a very glum face followed her along various passages, until they reached the chaste wing which was reserved for young lady guests. When Ella had left her alone in the luxurious chintz-bedecked room, she walked across to the fire, and stood staring into it, with an angry scowl. . . . The room seemed full of half-forgotten, profoundly humiliating memories.—That elegant young lady, that Miss Mackie who was even now eating her tea downstairs, was the girl Lily, whom she had first liked and then hated at the Miles. Toussaints, six years ago. . . . She had always been afraid she would meet one of those girls again—and now it had happened. So it was to spend ten days in the *same* house with *Lily* that Clytie had left her beloved Brocksden, and come all this way! . . . It was ludicrous—but it was *horrid*. She felt convinced that her visit must be a complete failure.

Fairlees was an old-fashioned house.—"I daresay we are old-fashioned in our ideas," Mrs. Montgomery would sometimes remark with satisfaction. It was only of late years that it possessed a smoking room; previous to this, such gentlemen as wished to indulge in the habit—no female had ever smoked at Fairlees—were obliged to retire to the conservatory.

The elder Montgomerys held decided views as to the undesirability of the promiscuous association in daily pursuits of men and maids. Croquet and tennis in summer, with the elder ladies looking on; and riding together,—so long as it was not a *little-à-little*

—were permissible. That ladies should hunt was apparently the modern custom, but neither Mrs. Montgomery nor her daughters had ever done so. It was regarded therefore with modified approval.

Considering MRS. Montgomery's extreme sense of propriety, one might have expected her to hold the views of the very early Church with regard to Holy Wedlock ; but on the contrary she had married young, and given birth to a considerable family. One son had died in infancy ; and the youngest had fallen in the South African war. Of the five daughters, four had made suitable alliances, and only Ella remained.

The present house-party had been selected, not only with hospitable intent, but with ulterior motives of a matrimonial nature. Arthur Montgomery was now thirty. It was time that he should think of choosing a wife and carrying on the name. As he had recently been quartered in places like York and Glasgow, the possibility of his becoming enamoured of some provincial young lady caused his mother as keen anxiety as her placid breast was capable of. The Campbells were a wealthy county family, and Mrs. Campbell having—unlike Lady Macbeth—brought forth female children only, there was reason to suppose that the eldest daughter would be an heiress. If Arthur should take a fancy to Janet Campbell, nothing could be more suitable, and fortunately she alone of the daughters had a certain pretension to good looks. If this came to nothing, there was Lady Cecily Wyse's niece, who had some of the best blood of Scotland in her veins, and seemed a quiet, well-bred girl.—So much for Arthur. Ella was a more difficult problem. Mrs. Montgomery had indulged in a faint hope that Arthur's friend, Captain Le Mesurier, might be suitable ; but when she incautiously dropped a hint of this to her son he was frankly disdainful.—“Le Mesurier marry Ella ! My dear Mater !” . . . So, for poor Ella's sake (Mrs. Montgomery had long fallen into the habit of thinking of her eldest daughter as “poor Ella”), their neighbour Mr. Nisbet, who farmed his own land on the other side of Cheviot, had been added to the party.

It had all seemed most promising, until at the eleventh hour Arthur upset everything by insisting that an invitation should be sent to a Glasgow young lady, whose parents had, he declared, showed him constant hospitality. As Arthur was quite capable of spending his leave elsewhere if his wishes were thwarted, poor Mrs. Montgomery, after many protests, dispatched an invitation, hoping against hope that her son would soon realise the difference between his Glasgow partner and the girls of his own world. This had indeed been the case, but unfortunately not in the sense which his

mother anticipated. Lily Mackie was dazzlingly pretty, and her many elaborate costumes quite outshone Janet Campbell's solidly built dresses. As for her manners, Mrs. Montgomery might shudder to hear herself addressed by name a dozen times in a short conversation—"Yes, Mrs. Montgomery"—"No, Mrs. Montgomery"; the Miss Campbells might wonder why she called napkins "serviettes," and spoke of herself and her friends as "young ladies"; but to Arthur Montgomery, and even to his more fastidious friend, she appeared an uncommonly attractive young person, and she had not been in the house many hours before she succeeded in monopolising their attentions, to the exclusion of the other girls.

In other ways also Mrs. Montgomery's carefully laid plans were going wrong. Mr. Nisbet remained proof against Miss Mackie's batteries, but, he was equally indifferent to Ella, and had begun to show signs of being attracted by Janet Campbell. Two of her five "dancing men" had failed, so that they must go unequal numbers to the ball. In short, Mrs. Montgomery began to fear that her pleasant little party would be a complete failure.

Clytie need not have felt such angry embarrassment at the idea of meeting Lily again. When she walked shyly and stiffly into the drawing-room that evening, Miss Mackie was so happily absorbed in the conversation of Captain Le Mesurier, that she did not even recognise her old school-fellow. During the interval after dinner, however, when the gentlemen remained in the dining-room over their port, her memory became more active. She greeted Clytie almost gushingly, seeming anxious to impress upon the other ladies the fact that they had been at school together—for Clytie, as a red-haired outcast in Eastonburgh had been a very different thing to Clytie as an accepted member of this very select county circle. But when the door opened, and the lamplight shone on the shirt fronts of the approaching gentlemen, Lily's interest in the "dear old days at school" abruptly flagged, and her one thought was to find a reasonable excuse for evacuating the chair between Clytie and Ella in which she had imprudently seated herself.

"Tell me, what do you think of Captain Le Mesurier?" Janet Campbell asked Clytie one afternoon as they were returning from making the circuit of the park under Ella's guidance. Miss Mackie was not of the party. She had been pale and listless all the morning, for the gentlemen had breakfasted early, and gone off to shoot before the ladies were down. Vainly had poor Lily—who had brought a particularly smart short tweed for the purpose—thrown out various hints that she was so fond of walking with the

guns—"Nothing could be more exciting than standing by a really good shot!" Mrs. Montgomery had appeared unconscious of the trend of her young guest's remarks; while even Arthur had remained silent, since, to his way of thinking, sport was too serious a business to be mixed up with the lighter side of life. Lily therefore had complained of a headache after lunch, and had retired to her room to rest.

"Captain Le Mesurier? . . . I don't think I do think about him," said Clytie smiling. "I haven't spoken to him yet."

"He took me in to dinner last night. He didn't talk much. He never does. But they say he's awfully clever."

"I thought he was splendid that day he came down late to breakfast—eating away and taking a third cup of coffee, as if he never noticed how cross Mr. Montgomery was at his keeping us all waiting for prayers.—I do think having prayers after breakfast is a *dreadful* plan. Of course they should come first."

"Still—visitors ought to be in time," murmured Miss Campbell, who truth to tell had no desire to discuss either Captain Le Mesurier or family prayers, but was extremely anxious to hear what Clytie thought of Mr. Nisbet.

"I don't like Captain Montgomery one bit," went on Clytie. "Do you? He's so off-hand to Ella."

"Brothers are, aren't they? I've never had one, of course, but I've noticed it. . . . Now Mr. Nisbet speaks so *nicely* of his sisters."

"Captain Montgomery seems to despise Ella. And she's always doing things for him. It makes my blood boil. If Johnnie treated *me* like that——!"

"I suppose it's different for men.—They have to work or go into the Army, and so on. Perhaps we shouldn't expect them to be as unselfish as women, who just stay at home, and really like to give things up for people they love. . . . And yet some men *are* unselfish."

Their conversation flagged, and they walked in silence over the dewy grass, each pursuing her own thoughts. Janet was trying to persuade herself that farming your *own* land was quite different to being a mere farmer. Lots of gentlemen did it. . . . Yet, what a pity it was he had not gone into the Army first, just for a bit,—to smarten him up. . . . Not that it affected her in any way of course.—She could not imagine why she was thinking about it. . . .

Meantime Clytie, whose brown eyes were gazing before her through the misty park, saw, beyond it, and as it were through the mist of years, a quiet plain figure in a very old tweed coat, compared

to whom those grand young officers with their "man of the world" air, their perfectly cut suits, their buckskin boots and gold cigarette cases, seemed to dwindle into a pair of "walking gentlemen" in the comedy of life.

Clytie had a new green silk frock which she had not yet worn, so she decided to put it on to-day for tea. Unfortunately, after the cruel fashion of those days, it fastened up the back with innumerable small buttons and hooks. For ten minutes she struggled with it in rising irritation, too shy to ring the bell and summon the smart housemaid, and half-inclined to throw it aside and put on the old brown one. At last she succeeded in fastening two out of every three hooks, and, happily unconscious that her neck was visible through a gap, she turned to look at herself in the glass. . . . A smile stole over her flushed countenance. The effect of her red head above the delicate leaf green seemed to her delightful. It *was* a pretty frock. With a feeling of exhilaration which she had not yet felt at Fairlees, she descended to tea.

An animated scene met her eyes. None of the elders were present, so Ella presided over the teapot. Janet Campbell and Mr. Nisbet had secured chairs beside each other; while on the other side of the table, every sign of her headache gone, sat Lily between Arthur Montgomery and Captain Le Mesurier. Delightfully aware of being the most attractive woman in the room, she was making the most of this unhoped-for escape from the critical eye of her hostess. Lily never chattered. Her drawling voice, though not sweet, was always soft—in company—but she trusted more to her eyes than to her conversational powers. She regarded herself as a refined and modest girl, fatally and involuntarily endowed with the power of attracting the other sex. That Arthur Montgomery was in love with her, she was convinced, and she believed that his friend also could not long hold out against her charms. As yet however, there was a self-possession in Captain Le Mesurier's manner, and a humorous half-mocking gleam in his eyes when they met hers, which piqued her extremely, and made her inconsistently feel that, of the two, she would prefer to marry him.

Nobody seemed to notice that Clytie had a new frock on, and she was sensible of a momentary dashing of her spirits. But the freer and more jovial atmosphere of the meal affected her also; and she was presently talking and laughing with Ella and Nettie, and secretly hoping that Mrs. Montgomery and Mrs. Campbell would not return from the sale at the Rectory too soon.

When there was no longer any excuse for dallying round the

tea-table, the question arose—"What shall we do now?" All felt that it was too good an opportunity for amusement, to be missed. Bridge was suggested and vetoed. "Consequences is a killing game," said Ella, to which her brother returned—"Paper games are stupid.—Such a fag looking for pencils". Finally it was decided to play some game on the billiard table, as the men were allowed to smoke there.

They all trooped along the passage, and paused in the doorway of the large dark billiard room.

"Tell 'em to bring lamps, Ella, will you . . . or no, I'll tell you what, we'll play hide and seek in the dark," drawled Arthur.

"Oh do let's—What *fun*," cried Clytie; but there was a momentary hesitation on the part of the other girls. Janet and Netta Campbell feared their mother might disapprove, and Lily Mackie, glancing at her pale mauve costume, protested that she personally had never cared for romping games.

"Never mind your gown. I'll give you a new one if you spoil it," whispered Arthur.

"I should not dream of accepting anything like that from a gentleman," she retorted with raised eyebrows.

"Line up please. Eyes front"—Captain Le Mesurier commanded. "Silence in the ranks there. . . . Eenie meenie mynie mo, Catch a nigger by the toe, If he squeals. . . .—You're It, Miss Montgomery. You must count a hundred before you come in."

It was pitch dark in the billiard room when the door was shut, and, in the momentary confusion, Arthur to his chagrin lost Lily. He groped about trying to find her, came into violent contact with the billiard table, said "Damn!" and finally resigned himself to the poor part of hiding alone and being caught by his sister. From the passage came the sound of Ella's voice conscientiously counting "84, 85, 86, . . ." Nettie Campbell was still fluttering to and fro, uncertain where to conceal herself.—"Be quick and hide. She'll be in directly," cried Clytie's voice, sounding as if from mid air.

Captain Le Mesurier had seized Lily by the hand.

"Come along with me. I'll show you a tophole place to hide."

"Perhaps I'd rather hide by myself though, Captain Le Mesurier!"

Since in spite of this protest she made no attempt to draw away her hand, he squeezed it, and led her across the room towards a broad leather sofa. Gallantly he assisted Lily to climb over the

back of it, and they sat down on the floor between the sofa and the wall.

"They won't look for us here. We're quite safe."

"But I've no room for my feet. I'm sure it's dusty too, and my frock——"

"Come more this way. You can get your feet under the sofa then——"

"I can't come nearer to you. Reely, Captain Le Mesurier——"

"Hush!"

With an abrupt movement he passed his arm round her waist and drew her nearer to him. "Is that better?" he inquired. Her quickened breathing was the only answer. Through the chaperoning stiffness of her stays, he could feel the yielding warmth of her body.

"What a jolly scent that is. What is it?"

"Lily of the Valley, of course. My name's Lily you see."

"It just suits you."

She giggled nervously and made a half-hearted effort to draw herself away, but, as his arm immediately relaxed, she remained where she was.

"I never let gentlemen call me by it, of course,—that is—unless we are very special friends."

There was a moment's silence. Captain Le Mesurier was debating in his mind whether he wanted to kiss her or not. Perhaps it was hardly worth while. They had to be in the house together for five more days. It would be a bore to have to keep up a flirtation all that time. Yet her scented presence beside him in the darkness stirred his senses agreeably.—"Damn it all!—She *expects* me to do it," he thought, and with a smile bent his face towards hers.

At this moment an excited "Cooee!" was heard, and the door was flung open admitting a stream of light against which Ella's rotund figure was silhouetted.

Captain Le Mesurier drew away his arm, and leant back against the wall. Ella's impetuous course at first led her towards the sofa; but she presently rushed in another direction. Lily and Captain Le Mesurier remained side by side on the floor. She maintained an enigmatic silence; it was difficult to tell whether she was offended or relieved by the interruption. Presently she sprang up with an abrupt movement which suggested pique, glided round the corner of the sofa, and was immediately caught by Ella.

Some ten minutes later, after much scuffling and laughter, everybody was caught, except Captain Le Mesurier who had sulkily

remained where he was, and Clytie. Ella, who was bumped black and blue by rushing against the billiard table, announced that she gave it up. Mr. Nisbet struck a match. During the exclamations elicited by seeing Clytie perched on the high mantelpiece, Captain Le Mesurier emerged from his cover unobserved.

"How *did* you manage to get up there without even a chair to help you?" cried the Campbells, while Arthur condescended to help her down, with the remark, "I say—you're a tophole climber."

They all went into the passage again.

"Well—Who's It this time?—Who was caught first?"

"Mith Mackie. She was caught first."

"Then Miss Mackie's It," said Nettie Campbell.

Lily's countenance fell. It would be too stupid to have to stay out in the passage alone while the others hid. With an air of altruism, she suggested—"Oh let some one else have the fun of being It, instead of me. I really don't mind. I'm not good at catching people."

"The first person caught is *always* It" muttered Nettie.

"Let's have two people to catch this time. I'll stay out too," suggested Captain Le Mesurier.

"Oh rot, there's no point in that; come along in," said Arthur, although he had been about to suggest the same thing himself!

Once again everybody scattered in the darkness. Creeping under the billiard table, Janet's hand accidentally came in contact with Mr. Nisbet's. She withdrew it quickly, feeling unaccountably discomposed and happy. Nettie, fired by Clytie's example, made an effort to climb on to the mantelpiece, and having torn her new skirt retreated crestfallen to her old place behind the window curtain. Clytie decided to have no special hiding-place this time, but to move here and there with as heavy and masculine a tread as possible, so as to tempt Lily in pursuit. That this idea was devoid of malice I cannot pretend!

Captain Le Mesurier had returned to his old hiding-place, having some reason to suppose that Miss Lily would look for him there. Well—if she did she should have no reason to complain of his backwardness. The man who sat in the dark with a girl like Lily Mackie for ten minutes, and made no use of his opportunities, could only be considered a muff. Otherwise why hide with her? . . . On second thoughts he climbed out again, and seated himself comfortably on the sofa. She would lean over it to see if he was in the old place. . . . Great sport those children's games. He sat waiting, a mischievous smile on his lips.

The door opened softly and was immediately closed again. A

profound silence followed, broken eventually by somebody knocking over some piece of furniture amid stifled laughter. Had Lily come into the room or not? If she had, she was lying low.

Le Mesurier was presently conscious of the faint rustle of an approaching petticoat. He sat up. . . . It was certainly coming towards him . . . and now it was passing him by. That was Miss Lily all over—to come to him, and then pretend she had not done so. He thrust out his arms and caught hold of something soft and feminine. Laughing silently, and leaving no time for coy resistance, he pulled his captive on to his knee, and kissed her on the neck. The sensation of pressing his lips against the soft warm skin was surprisingly agreeable; so he did it again, this time upon the cheek. To his blank astonishment the unseen maiden, with a gasp of unmistakable terror and rage, tore herself from his embrace, and vanished into the darkness.

Simultaneously the door of the billiard room was thrown open, and Mrs. Montgomery and Mrs. Campbell appeared on the threshold, while behind them, looking cool and composed, stood—Miss Lily Mackie! . . . “I believe they are playing some game in the billiard room,” she had informed Mrs. Montgomery in a detached manner; and she was now silently congratulating herself on having heard their arrival just as she was about to enter the room.

“Ella!” exclaimed Mrs. Montgomery. “Ella, where are you? . . . But the room is quite dark. You must be mistaken Miss Mackie. It is impossible there can be anybody here.”

“Mamma,” answered a trembling voice from under the billiard table, “we were just playing that game we used to play when we were children—hide and seek in the dark.”

There was an uncomfortable pause. Mrs. Montgomery looked speechlessly at Mrs. Campbell.

“Hardly a suitable game I think, when one is no longer a child,” said the latter with more than her usual decision of tone, but nevertheless with a twinkle in her eye.—“Do you not agree with me, Mrs. Montgomery? The girls might hurt themselves against the furniture or spoil their frocks.”

“C-certainly I agree with you, Mrs. Campbell. A most unsuitable . . . er . . . really! . . . Arthur, will you kindly light the lamp.”

From Mrs. Montgomery’s tone it was evident that she was greatly displeased; and she vouchsafed no answer to Captain Le Mesurier, who, strolling up to her, remarked—“You have just got back, I suppose”.

One by one the young ladies sheepishly emerged from their

hiding-places. Le Mesurier covertly observed each in turn, but as all seemed equally confused, he was just deciding with much relief that it was impossible to tell which he had kissed, when his eyes fell upon Clytie's face. Her cheeks were blazing, her mouth quivered, her eyes blinked fiercely to keep back her tears, and, most unmistakable sign of all, she alone of all the company appeared unconscious of the displeasure of her hostess.

Captain Le Mesurier promptly assumed his most cool and impassive air, but it was a relief to him that Mrs. Montgomery at once herded her young female guests before her towards the drawing-room. Following, at a safe distance, his suspicions were confirmed by seeing Clytie slip away from the rest. He saw her stumble in her impetuous flight upstairs, and could almost imagine he heard her burst into tears, even before gaining the shelter of her room. He strolled moodily towards the front door, opened it, and stood looking out into the raw darkness. Damnation! *Damnation!*—Nonsense, he was taking it too seriously! It was a ridiculous mistake, that was all. The child would forget all about it in a few days. . . . It was impossible she should guess who had done it.—Why he had been in the house with her for three days, and never spoken to her. . . . Supposing she did guess, what a deuce of a hole he would be in; having either to allow her to think him the biggest bounder and cad who ever walked, or to make the impossible admission—"Most awfully sorry, but upon my honour I thought you were Miss Mackie!"

3

That evening the familiar spirit of Fairlees, Dullness—after his temporary defeat between tea and dinner—brooded over and took possession of the house party. In the chaste privacy of the Montgomery's nuptial chamber, Mrs. Montgomery had spoken to her daughter with the severity of which only the stupid and highly respectable are capable. Hide and seek in the dark had been stigmatised as—"a game for the servants' hall"—and Ella had been told that at *her* age to have neither dignity nor a sense of decorum, was deplorable. Consequently the poor girl descended to the drawing-room with the feelings of a penitent Magdalen, and with eyes so red that nobody could avoid seeing that she had been crying. Mrs. Campbell had intended to give her girls "a brisk talking to," but as her questions quickly elicited the fact that Miss Mackie, in spite of her pretence to the contrary, had been in it as much as anyone, she was so delighted at having

her suspicions confirmed, that she contented herself with calling them great babies, and saying they must never do it again. Janet however was in low spirits, because of her mother's exclamation—"And to think of that stodgy Mr. Nisbet playing such a game!"

The atmosphere of the drawing-room was like a cold poultice. Even Arthur was uneasy under the chill of his mother's displeasure. To propitiate her, he sat down beside Janet Campbell, little dreaming that she was longing for him to be gone, and that only by an effort did she prevent her eyes from following Mr. Nisbet who was hovering uncertainly between the door and herself. She had presently the anguish of seeing him playfully summoned by Lily Mackie, who had taken up a strategic position upon the sofa, and was inwardly furious that neither Arthur nor Captain Le Mesurier had taken advantage of it.

"This Chesterfield is so comfortable, Mr. Nisbet. I feel quite selfish keeping it all to myself."

"Yes, it's a capital sofa," said he, longing to retreat but unable to think of any excuse for doing so.

"One sinks into it. I don't know how I shall ever get out of it. Do come and try it."

To so direct an invitation no reply was possible except to seat himself, leaving as wide an expanse of chintz between her bare arm and his black coat, as the length of the sofa permitted.

Captain Le Mesurier was leaning in silence against the mantel-piece. His bored blue eyes appeared to be fixed on space. Actually they were uneasily aware of a small figure seated on the other side of the room under the standard lamp, and of the forlorn droop of the red head over a piece of embroidery. Clytie's sensations had, like a wounded bird, first towered high up into the heights of agitation and fury, and now sunk to earth in an aching mortification. To have been kissed—*hugged and kissed!* in the dark, by a man, who, before this, had never shown her the least courtesy. Oh, it was unbearable, insulting, shameful! It was the sort of thing one would expect to happen to girls like Lily Mackie, but to herself, Clytie,—never. . . .

Which of the young men could have behaved in such a way. Was it Arthur?—to a guest staying under his mother's roof! Was it Captain Le Mesurier? One of those two it must have been,—but why, why had he done it. . . . Why had Mr. Milbanke behaved in the same way in the Brocksden wood? Two such episodes within so short a time, seemed to prove her a girl devoid of dignity, unable to prevent men from taking any liberties they liked with her. . . . Her face grew scarlet. She pulled her

ribbon so violently through her embroidery that it snapped. The thought which scorched her like a flame was—why had she not thrust him away before that second kiss? It had seemed impossible at the moment. She had felt bewildered, paralysed, unable to move. . . . But he must have thought that she *liked* it. Oh, to be home again and never see any of those people any more as long as she lived.

The various feeble efforts at conversation were flagging to the point of inanition. Lily was finding it but heavy going on the sofa with Mr. Nisbet. Arthur and Janet had some time ago relapsed into silence. Colonel Campbell had fallen asleep in his chair.

"Aren't we going to have some bridge, mater," said Arthur.

"Not to-night, I think." Mrs. Montgomery's glassy eye fell upon the gilt clock on the mantelpiece. It was but a quarter to ten. "Er—Mrs. Campbell, will one of the girls give us a little music?"

During the slight bustle which ensued, Captain Le Mesurier strolled across the room. As he approached her Lily's eyes welcomed him almost rapturously; but he passed her by, and deliberately seated himself on a small chair near Clytie.

"You are very industrious," he remarked. "May I see what you are making?"

In silence she handed him her embroidery.

He examined it gravely, with the air of a connoisseur.

"It seems to me *very* beautiful," he said at last.

In spite of herself the corners of Clytie's lips tilted upwards.—"It *is* beautiful," she said, forgetting for a moment her attitude of cold reserve. "It's my Aunt Cecily's work really. I'm only finishing it. The bad bits are mine."

"How modest you are.—I didn't see any bad bits."

There was a considerable pause during which Clytie's face resumed its expression of cold aloofness.

"A girl like that—she can't even talk to him. He won't stay there long," thought Lily, now deserted upon her sofa, Mr. Nisbet having moved towards the piano.

"Captain Montgomery talks of riding over to see the old abbey to-morrow. You ride of course?"

"Yes."

"Good. You'll like the abbey. It's a jolly old place."

Clytie bent over her work in silence.

"But perhaps after the shocking events of this afternoon we won't be allowed to go," went on Le Mesurier, glancing quizzically

at his companion's face, which was now suffused with a painful blush. . . . "We were—rather had, weren't we? Quite amusing! . . . I didn't think so at the time though; did you? Personally I cowered under the billiard table, like a small boy hiding from a whipping."

"You hid under the billiard table?"

"—And you went aloft, didn't you?"

Janet Campbell was by this time seated at the piano, with Arthur standing behind her, a look of unconcealed boredom on his face. Nervously she produced a pair of eyeglasses from some inner recess of her bodice, stared in a short-sighted manner at the music, and began to play. She had been well taught, but was always nervous. The sight of Mr. Nisbet, rising with alacrity from the sofa and approaching the piano, made her more so; and Mrs. Campbell presently frowned at the sound of a wrong note. What was Janet about? Really! This was the third time she had played a flat instead of a sharp. Fixing her eyes sternly on the player, she began beating the time with her fan on her lap. Aware of her mother's displeasure Janet grew flustered; waited for Arthur to turn the page and had to do it herself at the last moment; turned over two by mistake, lost her place, and hurried on to the end in an arpeggio of discords. Amid a general murmur of "Thank you" she rose from the piano, and with downcast eyes moved away, resolved that nothing should persuade her to play again.

Mrs. Montgomery again glanced at the clock. It was but a few minutes past ten, and ten-thirty, neither sooner nor later, was the traditional hour for Fairlees visitors of the female gender to go to bed. Most of the guests looked at the clock also, and there was an expectant pause.

Arthur boldly said, "Do sing us something, Miss Mackie". To this request Lily was very ready to accede; and, although as a rule she feigned fatigue, lack of music, and so on, in order to be pressed, on this occasion she was on her way to the piano before her hostess had reluctantly echoed "Yes,—er—pray let us have a song, Miss Mackie". As she spoke, Mrs. Montgomery was resolved that it should be but one. Lily had sung on the first evening of her visit, and she and Arthur had made it an excuse for remaining together at the piano for nearly an hour, turning over the music, and talking in undertones.

"Sing this," commanded Arthur.

"Oh no, not that one, Captain Montgomery. Reely—it's too silly. . . ."

"Not a bit of it. A top hole song. Lottie Wren sings it."

Slipping off her rings, Lily gazed with a dreamy smile at the ceiling—glanced round for a second to see if Arthur was admiring her—then in a high sweet but not absolutely true voice began to sing—

Hello ma baby—Hello ma baby
Here I am all alone.
Send me a kiss by wire,
That's all that I desire—
Send me a kiss by telephone, Baby,
One kiss by telephone—

At the end of the verse Mrs. Montgomery rose to her feet, and moved to the fender, where she waited majestically for the song to end.

"Bravo. Now sing us that——"

Arthur's voice was silenced by his mother's ceremonious—"Thank you, Miss Mackie. . . . Mrs. Campbell—er—shall we?"

Everybody rose and Captain Le Mesurier moved with polite alacrity to open the door. He was longing for a drink and a cheroot. Ella went out first, it being her evening task to light the candles now waiting in a row of massive silver candlesticks on the hall table. Then came the dowagers, with rustling silks. In a little group followed the three Campbells, Marion, who had a cold coming on, covertly blowing her nose, and Nettie pale with sleep; then Lily, gracefully provocative, and with a smile over her shoulder for Captain Montgomery. . . . Last of all came "the little MacLeod girl" with listless step, and downcast face. Something in the expression of her eyes reminded Captain Le Mesurier of a deer which he had wounded when he was a boy. He stood holding the door open, a tall distinguished looking man with regular features and an impassive expression, but at that moment he was feeling extremely uncomfortable. A rotten business—this thing he had done—to kiss a little girl like that. She had been so happy too, clambering on to the mantelpiece, and thinking of nothing but the fun of the game—just like a child—and now she was miserable. *His* doing. And why? . . . Because,—pitilessly his eyes followed poor Miss Mackie as, with gently undulating hips, she glided across the hall and accepted her candlestick from Ella with an affected smile—because he had thought it amusing to kiss that second-rate little provincial belle in the dark.

"I thought it wouldn't be bad fun to ride over to Holyford this afternoon, and have a look at the abbey," said Arthur.

Mr. Montgomery pursed up his mouth meditatively, and glanced across the breakfast table at his lady, wishing to ascertain her views on the subject before committing himself.

"I am afraid it is impossible for Mrs. Campbell and myself to accompany you this afternoon, as the Rectory party are coming to tea . . ." Mrs. Montgomery paused. As a rule any suggestion which involved the young people amusing themselves without their elders, met with her opposition. But even as she spoke the thought came to her that, being a Glasgow young lady, that dreadful Miss Mackie was probably unable to ride. It seemed an opportunity for keeping Arthur safely away from her for at least one afternoon. Her face therefore assumed an indulgent expression.

"—But I see no reason why that should prevent the expedition. . . . However, you must ask your father about the horses."

"There will be no difficulty about that, my dear. What time do you propose starting, Arthur? I must send word to the stables before they take them out exercising. Perhaps some of the young ladies may be persuaded to accompany you, as they have not seen the abbey."

"I advise your leaving not later than two, as you must be back before dusk. Really it gets dark so soon now, I almost think it would be better to go before luncheon."

"We can't do that. We're goin' to shoot."

"Had you not better put it off until to-morrow——"

"Oh no, mater. To-morrow's the ball. Besides it may rain. Let me see—how many of us are goin'. There's Le Mesurier and me—that's two anyhow. Any more offers? Nisbet will you come?"

Mr. Nisbet was unwilling to give a definite answer until he heard whether Janet Campbell—with whom he was now more nearly in love than he had been since his green salad days—was to be of the party. His evasive reply was cut short by Mr. Montgomery's reminding him that he had arranged to take him round the home farm. "Of course, yes. Most interesting," he murmured; but his dejection was dispelled a minute later, by hearing Mrs. Campbell regret that the girls had not brought their habits.

As Mrs. Campbell spoke, an agreeable vision floated before Lily's eyes of a slight girlish figure in a brown habit, riding between two masculine forms. Of course that stupid Miss Montgomery might be sent to play propriety, but *surely* it was her place to stop at home and amuse the Miss Campbells. Her hopes were dashed by hearing Clytie—whose existence she had for the moment forgotten—reluctantly admit that she had brought a riding habit.

"In that case you must certainly be of the party," said Mr. Montgomery.

Lily could not refrain from glancing at Arthur with a little *mouse* of disappointment. Clytie noticed this. Her temper rose. A moment before she had been about to make some excuse. She now promptly accepted her host's invitation.

"You do not ride, I suppose, Miss Mackie?"

"Oh yes indeed I do, Mrs. Montgomery. I am particularly fond of both riding and hunting thank you."

Mrs. Montgomery's jaw dropped perceptibly. With a forced smile she turned to her daughter.

"—In that case, Ella, I think you might drive the Miss Campbells over in the governess cart. It holds four, and Tiger is so quiet that, if Arthur took it round to the Inn for you, I think you could manage without Turnbull."

"I should not care for Ella to drive without Turnbull being there," said Mr. Montgomery decidedly.

"Nettie will stay with me; then there will be room," suggested Mrs. Campbell.

Nettie's face assumed an expression of protest.

"Upon the whole, perhaps they had better go in the carriage, that is, if Mrs. Campbell will be so kind as not to object to giving up our afternoon drive," said Mrs. Montgomery after a moment's meditation.

"—Always this eternal jaw and difficulty whenever we do anything!" young Montgomery growled, as he and Le Mesurier went to the smoking room. "My mother makes a point of askin' every one all round. It's only our luck that we don't go out a regular young ladies' ridin' school. If any more had wanted to come, I'd have chucked it. I can't stick goin' everywhere with a mob of females!"

5

At two precisely the horses came round, and a few minutes later Captain Le Mesurier, who was first on the field, heard some one tripping through the Hall. It was Lily. She was all animation and happiness.

"Oh the darling creatures. How I adore horses. Aren't they *sweet*, Captain Le Mesurier? That lovely brown horse with the white ankles is the best of all. I shall ride on him. Will you put me up, Captain Le Mesurier?"

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"Hadn't we better wait until Montgomery comes? That's his mare, you know."

Captain Le Mesurier was secretly taken aback by Lily's costume. Becoming it certainly was, with her bun of yellow hair peeping from under her velvet huntsman's cap, and a dainty jabot of lace falling over her tight-fitting brown coat; but it looked wrong somehow—more like the circus ring than a quiet country ride on a November afternoon. Blissfully unaware that there was criticism rather than admiration in his gaze, Lily strode jauntily down the steps, and advanced to pat Stella, who laid back her ears and edged away.

"Whoa lass. Steady. . . . I wouldn't go too near 'er, miss."

"Poor thing, it's tired of waiting, that's what it is. Come, Captain Le Mesurier, put me up."

"We'd better wait till Montgomery——"

"I don't care *what* Captain Montgomery says; besides I'm sure he meant me to ride his horse."

Feeling it awkward to dispute the matter before the servants, Le Mesurier shrugged his shoulders and bent down. Taking her foot, which was very neat in its pointed shiny boot, between his hands, he said "*Now*," and lifted. Lily's left leg flew high in the air, but the rest of her remained where it was!

"Sorry! My fault. I should have counted. You must spring at three. . . . One, two, *three*——"

This time he landed Lily in a reclining position across the saddle. As she struggled to sit up, Stella fidgeted, and with a little scream she slipped back on to the gravel.

"It's such an *enormously* tall horse"—she complained, straightening her hat; "—besides I never saw such a way of putting a lady on. The riding master *always* lifted us——"

"Just as you like.—Make that beast stand will you," said Le Mesurier sharply, for the covert grin of the groom irritated him. He took her by the waist and lifted her on. She was gathering up her reins, when Arthur appeared on the steps.

"I say—What the deuce! You've put the side saddle on Stella. I told you, Astur——"

"Beg pardon, sir, when we took Astur out I noticed he was goin' a bit short on the off fore, so I thought——"

"It's not your business to think. You should have come and asked me."

"And is this your beautiful Stella?—The horse you told me about," cried Lily. "I *am* glad I'm riding her."

"Well—I don't know about that. There's no vice in her, but she needs a bit of riding."

"I'm delighted to hear it. I love a spirited horse."

"Look here—I think you had better take Ella's cob."

"—And leave Miss MacLeod to be run away with by Stella? No thank you, Captain Montgomery!"

"I'm not proposing to allow anybody to ride Stella except myself," said Arthur shortly; adding in an undertone, "Come, hop down. Don't make a fuss before the men."

Lily, however, was determined to stay where she was. If he imagined she was a beginner, he was quite mistaken. Why, she had even hunted! "I'm not one bit afraid," she repeated, flushing with pleasure at the thought that everybody must be impressed by her courage. "*Do* let me ride her, Captain Montgomery. Just this once."

When Lily looked at him as she was doing now, even Arthur could not resist. "Righto," he said, "come along. Don't let's waste any more time."

Motioning to the boy to bring Ella's fat cob alongside, he turned rather impatiently towards Clytie, who had been a silent spectator of what had occurred. Without waiting for him to mount her she laid her hand on the pommel, and sprang from the steps into the saddle.

"Well done! A jolly good performance," ejaculated Arthur. Clytie was settling her habit, and did not appear to hear the compliment.

They moved off, Stella prancing a little, which rather discomposed Lily who thought she was rearing. Captain Montgomery insisted upon their walking as far as the lodge gates. "Walk a mile out and a mile in and you'll never have puffy legs," he informed Lily, who naïvely replied that it seemed rather a pity with such lovely grass for a canter.—"Good Lord!" exclaimed Arthur with a crow of laughter—"I'd like to see the gov'nor's face if he caught us ridin' on his grass verges."

They passed through the lodge gates, and turned out on to the broad high road. "We can go ahead now," said Arthur, pulling his horse on to the grass. Clytie and Le Mesurier did the same, but Stella was taking Lily along the middle of the road at an excited head-tossing trot, which soon became a canter. In vain did her anxious owner shout "Pull her in to the soft side—Get her off the road!" Excited by the sound of her own feet clattering on the well-metalled highway, Stella bucked twice, and rushed ahead. Lily dropped her whip and despairingly

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clutched the mane. Her ~~hat~~ came over her eyes. Her little lace jabot blew away. Dire necessity compelled her to use her glove as a handkerchief. For nearly two miles they swept onward, hedges and trees rushing past them. Then of her own accord Stella slackened speed, and finally stopped dead, and looked inquiringly round for the other horses.

Captain Montgomery came up at a brisk canter.

"I say," he shouted almost before he was within hearing, "you mustn't let her do that. It's enough to lame any horse bucketin' her along 'the 'ard 'igh road!' Can't you hold her? She's got a mouth like satin."

"Of course I can hold her—but you started to trot before I was ready."

They rode on together at a foot pace, their voices blending in bass scolding, and treble protestations.

Meantime the other couple were more than a mile behind. Ella's fat cob was a confirmed slug, and Clytie was gradually left in the rear. "I do think they might have given me a decent mount," she thought, as she belaboured her reluctant steed in order to catch up Captain Le Mesurier, who was waiting for her at the top of the rise.

"That horse of yours seems hot stuff, Miss MacLeod," he remarked.

Clytie's scowling expression relaxed.

"Yes, it's awful. He wants to run away with me all the time——"

"—I'm afraid you're not one of those dashin' riders like Miss Mackie."

"I should like to be—but I haven't the nerve," said Clytie sadly.

They both laughed.

"Montgomery picked up that mare for an old song from a fellow in a line regiment. She's a clipper. I say, *you* ought to have ridden her to-day."

Clytie said nothing.

"I'll arrange for you to ride her on the way home. I'll speak to Montgomery——"

"Please don't."

"Why not?"

"Because—I'm not going to ride other people's ~~horses~~ when they don't want me to."

Coming round a bend of the road they saw below them the grey towers of the abbey, with the river winding past it.

"Ah! . . ." exclaimed Clytie.

"You haven't seen it before? It's a great place. Those old fellows knew how to build, didn't they?"

They began to descend, and the hedges, still covered with red berries and withered beech leaves, hid the abbey from sight.

"Why don't you like Captain Montgomery?" asked Le Mesurier. This unexpected question took Clytie unawares. Before she had time to reflect, she had answered—"I don't think he's a gentleman".

"Now, what makes you say that?" he asked looking fixedly at her.

Clytie grew scarlet and made no reply.

The silence lengthened. It was becoming disquieting. Captain Le Mesurier was still looking at her, and frowning a little. It was clear that he did not intend to speak again, until she had answered his question. Well, two could play at saying nothing. She closed her mouth firmly, and kicked Dapple to make him walk up. But she was painfully conscious of the steady gaze of those cold blue eyes.

"You *must* tell me why you said that," said Le Mesurier at last.

"Why should I?" she demanded, glancing sideways at him.

"Because it's a serious accusation to make against anyone. I take it you wouldn't have said it without some reason? . . . Come, Miss MacLeod. Let's have it out. I know Montgomery pretty well—We're in the same regiment you know. If he's done anything to offend you. . . . There may be some mistake."

His face too had grown rather red. Clytie put it down to indignation at her attack on his friend. Why—why had she said that, when it was impossible for her to explain her reason. Embarrassed to the point of fear, yet with a feeling of indignation too, she answered—"I'm sorry. I didn't know he was in your regiment."

Captain Le Mesurier looked astonished, almost sceptical.

"You didn't know *that*?"

"No, I didn't. Somehow, in the many pleasant talks I've had with you and Captain Montgomery, it was never mentioned!" flashed out Clytie.

There was an embarrassed silence. Both of them gazed with feigned interest at the abbey which had come into sight again.

"So you don't mean to tell me your reason," said Le Mesurier.

"I don't mind. Look at the way he treats Ella."

"His sister. . . . H'm, perhaps he does. Manners aren't exactly his strong point, I admit. But——"

He glanced at Clytie, bit his lip and struck with his cane at an outgrowing spray of barberries. It was no good. His sudden idea of explaining to her that she had no cause of offence against Arthur, was impossible.

"What do you mean by a gentleman"—he asked, smiling.

"I don't know . . . I mean I do know, and so do you,—but it's so difficult to put some things into words."

"Have a shot at it."

"Well—Somebody who never boasts, or bullies, and—and who's as nice to an old plain woman as—I mean who couldn't be rude to a woman even if she was a kitchen maid. And who'd rather be cheated than take advantage of the other person. My Uncle Peter's like that. When he's selling a horse he tells all its bad points first, and he always sells it at a loss, because he's afraid of asking more than it's worth. . . . A gentleman doesn't think much of himself at all, because he's sure of himself, so it's not worth bothering about."

"Well, your description disposes of most of us, pretty effectually," said Le Mesurier.

"I hope not," said Clytie.

"—Not many men are perfect, you see."

"A gentleman needn't be perfect—but—he *must* be a gentleman."

"I should guess that your favourite character in history was Sir Galahad." Captain Le Mesurier spoke in a lighter tone. Both were aware that the question, secretly so embarrassing to each of them, as to why Clytie did not think young Montgomery a gentleman, was safely tided over.

"No he isn't. I like King David far better."

"What? In spite of that little episode with Uriah?"

"Bathsheba had no business to take her bath on the roof"—exclaimed Clytie.

Le Mesurier's lips parted, and a peal of laughter issued from them. It was a good laugh, hearty, unaffected, and astonishingly youthful. Clytie, although abashed at what she had said, liked him better at this moment than she could have believed possible yesterday.

At the gate of the abbey they found the groom loosening the girths of Stella and the grey. He gave them rather a characteristic message from Arthur, that they were to leave their horses at the inn, which was at the other end of the village. Le Mesurier's eyebrows rose. Paying no attention to the groom's directions, he dismounted, and put up his hands to lift Clytie down.

"But, if we're to go to the inn——"

"I'll take your pony to the inn, of course."

Arthur and Lily were standing together in the transept, she with her head bent and her hands busy with her hair, he holding her hat. Apparently he had criticised her style of coiffure, for Clytie heard her retort——

"Oh yes, I dare say you'd like me to have it screwed up in a rat tail like Clytie MacLeod's; but even if I wanted to, I couldn't. My hair's far too thick."

In embarrassment Clytie concealed herself behind a column; but, while she examined the wealth of carving which embraced it, she could not avoid hearing snatches of their conversation.

"That won't stay up five minutes. Let me have a shot at it."

A pause. A slight scream.

"Mercy! You ran that pin right into my head."

"Sorry. Shall I make the place well?"

"Arthur! Nonsense! Behave at once or I'll do it up myself."

"I suppose they're engaged. Poor Mrs. Montgomery"—thought Clytie; then felt a rush of anger that a man, engaged to another girl, should have dared to behave in such a way to herself. "He's horrid. He's just as common as she is," she thought.

"Hello, Le Mesurier. Got here at last," said Arthur; upon which Clytie issued from her hiding-place, and joined them.

"How I adore those quaint old places—there's nothing like them," exclaimed Lily, giving for the first time a cursory glance round the abbey. Her affected raptures effectually silenced Clytie's genuine emotion, for indeed the old abbey was as beautiful a place as she had ever seen, and there was something immortal even in its decay. She moved away down the ruined aisle, and gazed up at the great rose window which looked like some rare old lace against the pale November sky. Captain Le Mesurier followed her, and drew her attention to the figure of a knight in armour lying with folded hands on his grey tombstone.

"Do you notice he doesn't seem to be dead, but just sleeping," he said.

His remark surprised Clytie. She had not imagined that he was the kind of man to notice such things; and as he led her round the abbey, pointing out curious carvings which she might not have noticed for herself, and telling her various stories of its past history, she listened with a feeling of shame at having so misjudged him.

"How do you know all this?"

"I used to come over here a good deal when I was a boy. My uncle lives near here you know. There was an old soldier fellow

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with one leg who looked after it then, and he told me lots of things about it, most of which I've forgotten.—I say, I hope this sort of thing doesn't bore you?"

"Oh no. I love it——" began Clytie, when the sound of voices interrupted her, and she saw the carriage party bearing down on them. Le Mesurier lit a cigarette and strolled away. Ella began taking the Campbells round the abbey. Janet presently fell behind and joined Clytie.

"It was rather a pity Mr. Nisbet couldn't come," said she, in a voice which she strove to render indifferent. "He wished to come, but he had promised Mr. Montgomery. . . . He would have known more about the abbey than anyone, as his place is not far from here."

Clytie opened her lips to say—"He couldn't know more about it than Captain Le Mesurier," but thought better of it, and instead suggested that they should explore the garden. A ruined arch, with a monk's girdle knotted round it, led them into a paradise of green turf, and autumnal trees leaning towards the river. In the middle of it stood Arthur and Lily, Ella and the Campbells. There was evidently some dispute, for Ella's good-natured face was pink, while Arthur's had assumed an expression of smiling obstinacy. Lily stood a little apart, gazing with a pensive air at a bunch of chrysanthemums which she carried.

"—too bad if you go off just when we've come," Ella was saying. "Do stay a *little* longer, then we can all go back together."

"A brilliant idea!" said Arthur with a short laugh.—"Nothing so jolly as ridin' in the dust of a carriage."

"Well but you surely needn't go yet. It's only half-past three——"

"And the light goes about four! And it'll take us ten minutes anyhow to get our horses from the Rose. I promised the mater to be back before dark. Come along, Miss Mackie."

Poor Ella struggled to control herself, then burst out—

"Well I think it's *very* unkind of you, Arthur! It spoils everything. We might as well not have come."

"*You* can stay here as long as you like.—Le Mesurier!—Where's Le Mesurier?" . . . In a low angry voice he added—"You're making a perfect fool of yourself, Ella."

Clytie felt furious. There was nobody else near them, as the Campbells had discreetly moved away. She could not resist exclaiming—"I think Ella's quite right."

A cold astonished stare was his only reply, but Clytie's blood being up she returned it with haughtiness; while poor Ella,

delighted at finding an ally, began explaining in a loud whisper that it was *so* rude to the Campbells! That was what she minded!

Le Mesurier joined them. As he indifferently acquiesced to Arthur's suggestion that they had "better be orfing it," no more was said, and they departed, leaving a forlorn little group behind them in the abbey.

While they were waiting in the inn yard for their horses to be brought out, Le Mesurier drew Arthur aside.

"I say—hadn't Miss Mackie better ride the cob this time? Stella always pulls going home; they might have a smash. Besides it's bad luck on Miss MacLeod having the cob both ways you know. She can ride all right."

As a matter of fact Arthur himself had, twenty minutes before, decided upon this very arrangement: but resentment at what he considered Clytie's "infernal cheek" in speaking to him like that in the garden, was even stronger than his anxiety for his mare.

"I'll have the saddles changed, and ride Stella myself," he said.

"But the grey hasn't carried a lady, has he?"

"No he hasn't; but William can lead him home, and Miss MacLeod must go in the carriage. Lily can manage the cob all right."

Le Mesurier stared and exclaimed—"That's out of the question".

"Why?"

"Because it would be damnably rude to Miss MacLeod."

"I don't see that at all."

"First to give her the worst mount so that she was behind all the way here, and then. . . . My dear chap, one doesn't do those things!"

Had it been anybody else but Le Mesurier, this opposition would have stiffened Arthur's resolve. As it was he reddened, and after a minute said sulkily—"All right then. We'll go back as we came. The mare'll be all right if we go quietly."

The air was mild for November, the woodland road was strewn with russet and golden leaves, and a pile of clouds in the west gave promise of a fine sunset. Clytie was fain to admit to herself that, in spite of her slow cob, this was a pleasant way of spending a winter afternoon. Hitherto she had ridden with no young man except Johnnie, who was an uncomfortable companion, as he rode for the sake of exercise only, and insisted on trotting unceasingly. She admired the way in which Captain Le Mesurier managed his horse, which was fretting to overtake the other horses; admired

too his pale handsome face, and his lean strong body in its old but immaculate riding-kit. She had never seen a stock tied like that before: Arthur Montgomery's was too high and tight, Uncle Peter's too loose, but Captain Le Mesurier's was just right, and, as Clytie could never tie a stock to her satisfaction, she was much impressed. And this distinguished being was riding by her, talking to her, making her laugh. It was impossible not to be gratified! Men of this type whom she had met before had hardly seemed conscious of her existence. Vividly she remembered an incident during her visit at the castle; how, crossing the moor, one of those superior young men had offered her his hand to come down a glidder of rock; then, noticing that a smart young married woman needed assistance, had let go of Clytie at the critical moment, with the result that she had slipped and barked her knuckles. Arthur Montgomery would have behaved in just that way. . . . But Captain Le Mesurier would not.

"Here's a good soft side. Let's go ahead," she cried.

"All right. . . . I say, you *are* making old Dumpling step out."

"It's because he's going home——"

Cantering briskly round a corner they almost rode into the other couple, at which Stella began to diddle excitedly. Lily imprudently jerked the curb. Stella laid back her ears, threw up her head, and galloped off along the middle of the road as before. With a smothered "Damn!" Captain Montgomery followed her.

Le Mesurier laughed rather sarcastically. Trotting steadily, they caught them up again about a couple of miles farther on. They were dismounted. Lily, whose hair was half down her back, was looking distinctly crestfallen, while Arthur, with a gloomy face, was examining Stella's fetlock.

"She's struck herself again—in the old place, when I thought I had completely broken her of it. But I knew how it would be!—Bucketin' her along in the middle of the road"—he angrily informed the world at general.

Le Mesurier too dismounted and examined the injured fetlock.

"Not much harm done," was his verdict, "but she'll have to be walked home. We'd better change the saddles. Miss MacLeod can ride the grey."

"I'm not goin' to take the saddle off the mare when she's sweating like this,"—growled Arthur.

"I can ride astride," said Clytie.

Captain Montgomery gave her a glance of grudging approval. "You can? Good. Well, you'd better be goin' on. I'll have to lead Stella all the way home, I suppose."

“I’m frightfully sorry, but it wasn’t really my fault, *was* it Captain Le Mesurier?” protested poor Lily. “I was managing her perfectly until *she*—” glancing angrily at Clytie, “came rushing up behind us. . . . *Please* Captain Montgomery let me ride Stella home. I can’t bear your having to walk, and I do hate failing in a thing I’ve made up my mind to do. Surely if we go *very* quietly——”

“Kindly allow me to arrange things as I think best,” said Arthur.

Lily flushed scarlet, and in an embarrassed silence they set off, Clytie astride on Arthur’s grey with a good deal of boot showing; Lily on the cob; and Arthur following on foot with a face like a thunder-cloud. At that moment he felt so completely “fed up” with Lily, that he wished he had never forced his mother to have her at Fairlees. Girls like that were all right at a dance, or to fool around with when there was nothing better to do, but in the serious things of life—Well, she was the sort of girl who would chatter through the finals of a polo tournament! . . . If he had ever thought of making a fool of himself in the matrimonial way, this afternoon would have cured him of that. Stella wouldn’t be fit to hunt for a week at least, and in ten days his leave ended!

Before they had ridden half a mile, Lily began to recover from her mortification, which had at first subdued her to complete silence. Manœuvring the cob in between Clytie and Le Mesurier, she began chattering about the various balls and parties at which they had met during the Glasgow season. Wearying of a conversation from which she was almost pointedly excluded, Clytie rode on ahead, and her ears presently tingled at a remark of Lily’s which seemed to be making fun of her appearance.—“She’s not worth hating!” she was telling herself, while her inner feelings contradicted the sentiment, when Captain Le Mesurier rode alongside of her and asked if she would like her stirrups shortened.

“No thanks, I don’t need stirrups,” said Clytie shortly.

“Good. Why don’t all girls ride astride? It’s much the best way.”

“What an odd idea,” cried Lily, laughing affectedly. “I never heard of young ladies riding astride. It would look so odd, and with a well-cut habit riding is such a pretty thing—don’t you think so, Captain Le Mesurier?”

“I think Miss MacLeod looks uncommonly well like that.”

By this time they were approaching Fairlees village, and there was scarcely light enough left to let them see that the hands of the clock on the old church pointed to five.

"Who would have dreamt that it was so late! But I never notice how time goes when I'm on horseback," cried Lily.

"We'll go through the bridle gate, across the park. It's shorter," said Le Mesurier.

They turned off the road, down a muddy lane, and a minute later were trotting over the wet grass of the park. For five hundred yards all was well. Then an unexpected obstacle appeared in the shape of a couple of lines of low sheep hurdles barring their progress. Lily's heart sank within her at the idea of jumping—a thing which she had never done, as, on the much vaunted but solitary occasion on which she had gone hunting, the riding master had piloted "herself and the other young ladies" through a series of gates. She was much relieved to hear Captain Le Mesurier shout that they must pull up and go back, as it was too dark for jumping. Clytie, however, chose to turn a deaf ear to this injunction, and forging ahead was over the hurdle in a twinkling.

"Personally, I don't feel we have the right—" began Lily; but even as she spoke Dapple, excited by the proximity of his evening feed, made an unexpected rush at the hurdle. In the agitation of the moment Lily dropped her reins and clutched the saddle; but she was over safely, and rapidly overtaking Clytie, who was endeavouring to steady the grey before taking the second hurdle.

In vain did Le Mesurier shout to Lily to pull up. Dapple was galloping as he had never galloped before, and was almost on the heels of the grey.—"There'll be a smash," groaned Le Mesurier, speeding after them. The next minute Clytie's horse rose to the hurdle, landed on a feeding trough which was concealed in the grass on the other side, and pecked heavily. With the utmost promptitude Lily and Dapple jumped on the top of them.

When Le Mesurier reached the scene of the catastrophe, two horses,—one of them riderless—were careering away through the dusk in the direction of the house. Clytie lay motionless upon the ground; but as he dismounted and hurried towards her, to his immense relief she sat up, then staggered in a dazed manner to her feet.

"You're hurt!" he exclaimed, taking her by the arm.

"N—Not a bit," said Clytie with an effort, for the park was swimming round her, and she had a curious sensation as if the two sides of her lungs were sticking together. She heard a far-away peremptory voice telling her to sit down and keep quiet for a minute. . . . It blended oddly with another voice out of the

distant past—"Are you hurt, Clytie? Where are you hurt?" and for a moment wet beech trees seemed to surround her, and she heard the sound of the Adder rushing by. Blessed vision. With closed eyes she embraced it, lying very still lest it should pass away. . . . Then with a sigh she returned to reality, and looked up into the pale frowning face which was bending over her.

"Please may I get up? The grass is soaking," she murmured.

A strong but gentle hand raised her to her feet. The mud was rubbed off her jacket. Her whip was picked up. Her ruined bowler was carried for her. Never had she been the object of such attentions. But all the time every line of his countenance seemed to say—"If you had obeyed me, this would not have happened."

"Take my arm."

"But I'm quite all right. Not hurt a bit. . . . I *was* a fool, Captain Le Mesurier. I never saw that trough."

"Take my arm," said Le Mesurier, raising his voice.

At a slow pace they set off towards the house. For all her protestations, Clytie felt badly shaken. Her knees seemed to have come unscrewed, and her head was beginning to ache consumedly; yet, in spite of those unpleasant sensations, and a certain awe of her grimly silent companion, the humorous side of this dolorous return arm in arm from the afternoon's outing so struck her that she began to shake with repressed laughter. Believing that she was in tears, Le Mesurier looked at her in dismay, which changed to ironical surprise.

"You find it amusing to be thrown on your head, and jumped on?"

"No-o—but you look as if we were a funeral."

"It very nearly was, young lady. Let me tell you that."

"I can't make out what happened. He only came half down, and I thought I'd pulled him up; then suddenly we seemed to go down with a crash——"

At this moment Lily was seen returning through the gloaming at a cautious walk.

"This *brute* ran away with me, and I've lost my hat. Somebody must be sent to fetch it," were her first words, followed by an ungracious—"I hope you're not hurt, Miss MacLeod, but what on earth made you fall off just in front of me?"

"I *didn't* fall off," cried Clytie angrily.

"Well your horse did, which comes to the same thing. The miracle was you didn't bring me down too."

Poor Lily. The resentment with which she had realised earlier

in the afternoon that Clytie was considered a better rider than she, now found vent in an almost spiteful satisfaction at her rival's downfall. Her triumph was short lived. An icy voice broke in on her complaints.

"You *jumped on her*," said Le Mesurier.

"Of course I jumped on her"—Lily's voice rose almost to a squeak. "How could I help it when she fell off right in front of me?"

Le Mesurier's jaw had become quite square. His half-closed eyes examined Lily with a cold curiosity.—"You had the whole fence to choose from, and you *jumped on her*. Your cob landed right on the top of her—I don't know how you didn't break her back! . . . I strongly advise you to give up riding, Miss Mackie."

"But reely, Captain Le Mesurier—I did try to—I must explain"—cried poor Lily, but Le Mesurier had already moved on.

As they approached the house Clytie said—

"Captain Le Mesurier. *Please* don't let's say anything about it. The horse isn't a bit hurt, so nobody need know."

"All right. But look here—You must go to bed."

"I can't possibly. How can I?"

"You must. It's the only thing to do after a heavy fall. You go upstairs, and leave me to explain."

"But then they'll all know——"

"They'll certainly know if you don't do what I say; for I'll tell them," said Le Mesurier.

They looked at each other in silence.

"If I go to bed, will you promise——"

"Yes."

"All right. . . . But it's absurd. You talk to me as if I was a child," cried Clytie, laughing, but somewhat nettled.

"You are a child, if you don't know the risk of concussion . . . but I must confess you're a very plucky one," said Le Mesurier, smiling for the first time.

6

Next morning found Lily sitting in solitary state in the drawing-room, which looked especially large and gloomy with the rain pattering against the window-panes. The clock pointed to twelve. She had been sitting there for more than an hour, with nothing to amuse her except yesterday's paper and the sound of Mrs. Campbell's pen in the adjoining room, where she was rapidly inditing letters to her two youngest daughters. It was even duller than

last night, when Arthur and Captain Le Mesurier had vanished to the billiard room after dinner, while Lily was left to play bridge—for love—with the Campbell girls and Mr. Nisbet. This morning they had gone off to the stables when breakfast was finished. Lily felt convinced that all this was the doing of that rude disagreeable Captain Le Mesurier. He was keeping Arthur away from her on purpose, because he knew very well that if Lily got him to herself, she could quickly make him forget Stella's injured fetlock. Meantime her ennui and sense of injury were becoming hard to bear. Where had those other girls gone? They would be better than nothing. Was it county manners to leave a visitor all by herself like this? If so, she preferred Glasgow manners. The sound of a chatelaine jingling in the passage, and a glimpse of Mrs. Montgomery's face, wrinkled with the agitation of a prolonged discussion with her husband as to the alternatives of bus and brougham or brougham landau and wagonette to convey the party to the ball, sent her stealing out through the farther door.

Nobody in the hall. She would go to her room and look at her costume for the evening. She believed that one of the rosettes on her shoes was loose. As she went disconsolately upstairs, a burst of laughter from the end of the passage made her prick up her ears. *That* was where they were, was it?—in the old schoolroom. And was it possible that she heard a man's voice too! She rushed into her bedroom, smoothed her hair before the glass, dabbed a little powder on her nose which was slightly pink from sitting before the fire, and, humming a little song, went along the passage and into the schoolroom.

Arthur was not there. . . . Mr. Nisbet and Janet were sitting on the window seat, he holding her wool, while she wound it: Nettie crouched before the fire, carefully stirring the contents of a pot from which rose a sweet savour; Marion and Ella were sitting on the sofa; while, in the background, Clytie and Captain Le Mesurier were spreading butter on two large ashets. Everybody looked very contented.

"Come along, Mith Mackie—You're just in time to taste the toffee," said Ella kindly.

"What?—Are you making toffee? Oh *do* let me help," exclaimed Lily. Rolling up her sleeves so that her white arms were becomingly displayed, she took the spoon out of Nettie's reluctant hand. "You sit down and rest. You must be quite tired bending over this hot fire. I'll go on stirring it," she cried with resolute officiousness.

Lily's worst enemy could not have denied that she made a

charming picture, kneeling gracefully on the hearth-rug, with the fire shining upon her yellow hair. Her playful appeals to the two gentlemen put an effective end to all other conversation. . . . —Oh dear! her sleeve was slipping down—and her hands were sticky—Would Mr. Nisbet mind rolling it up? . . . Did Captain Le Mesurier remember the sweet stall at the big bazaar in Glasgow, and what a roaring trade they did with *her* toffee on that occasion? . . . *Now*, she believed it was nearly ready—Would somebody give her a glass of water?

It was the supreme moment in toffee making, and, though Nettie with sullen eyes held aloof, everybody else gathered round Lily as she dropped a spoonful of the boiling mixture into the cold water. It sank to the bottom in a firm mass. The toffee was ready.

“Quick, quick—give me those plates, Captain Le Mesurier. Every minute now spoils it”—cried Lily in a becoming fluster. With a steady hand she poured out the toffee until both ashets were brimming. “There! Now it must be put in a cool place to harden. The window seat—if you don’t mind sitting somewhere else, Miss Campbell,—that is the very place for it.”

“How very officious she is; and how much pleasanter it was before she came,” thought Janet, as she moved out of the way with apparent good humour. Indeed the little party seemed effectively broken up. Captain Le Mesurier was moving towards the door, and Mr. Nisbet was wondering if it would look odd for him to remain like Achilles among the maidens, when the door opened, and Arthur Montgomery appeared.

“—You people goin’ to fug in the house all the morning? It’s fine now. What about a walk before lunch?”

Everybody was very ready to agree to this proposal except Marion, who, in the bustle of departure, was heard lamenting that she had promised mamma not to go out in the damp with her cold. As they assembled in the hall, hatted and booted, Nettie heard Lily remark,

“Aha! Captain Montgomery, you’ve missed something this morning. I’ve been making toffee! But as you weren’t there to help, I shan’t give you one bit!”

Nettie burnt with indignation, which insisted on finding expression as she walked down the avenue with Captain Le Mesurier.

“—Did you hear that? Captain Le Mesurier, did you hear what Miss Mackie said?—That *she* had been making toffee. Why it was almost done before she came! Nobody wanted her to come

poking in, taking the spoon away from me when I was just going to try it. I cannot stand that sort of interference."

"Yes, it was rather hard luck on you."

"—Saying she would not give him any too. It is not hers to give. It is *our* toffee. I suppose the next thing will be her cutting it up, and offering us each a piece!"

"I see you have a strongly developed sense of *meum* and *tuum*, Miss Campbell."

"I don't know what you mean, but certainly I would never try to bag somebody else's toffee as she did!"

Meantime the unconscious object of Nettie's wrath was dropping gradually into the rear, with Arthur by her side; and as the latter's visit to the stable had reassured him with regard to his mare's fetlock, he was in the mood to lend an indulgent ear to Lily's regrets. A complete reconciliation was effected between them, and their conversation assumed so intimate and personal a tone as to fill Lily with the happy anticipation that he would declare himself at the ball that very evening!

Although Lily had enjoyed more admiration during her first season than Clytie in her whole life, and had already received three offers (which, as they came from young men of her own class, she had disdainfully refused) she was now, at the age of twenty-three, seriously bent upon marrying, and marrying well. The state and dignity of Fairlees had impressed her considerably: it was altogether superior to the villas or hired shooting boxes of the friends whom she usually visited. Her old school friend, Mina, had recently wedded a minister of the Free Kirk; and Lily had enjoyed writing to her on Fairlees paper, with "c/o The Hon. Mrs. Montgomery" clearly written at the top. If Lily married Arthur, she would at a bound enter a circle into which ministers' wives were not admitted. Mrs. Arthur Montgomery of Fairlees! How well it sounded . . . and what a good set down it would be for those plain stiff girls of his own set, if the engagement could be announced before the party broke up.

"Come along to the vinery. I'll give you a bunch of grapes if you're good," said Arthur.

"My uncle grows his own grapes too; they are considered the best in Broughty Ferry."

"Half a mo'—there's Le Mesurier. I promised to show him the ferrets, and there's just time before lunch."

"And what about my grapes?" said Lily pouting.

"Righto. I won't forget. I'll take you there after lunch. Hello—Le Mesurier—"

"What is it?" said Le Mesurier, coming up.

"I'll show you the ferrets now, if you like——"

"Ferrets? I *should* like to see them. I've never seen a ferret," said Lily, falling into step between them, and daintily raising her skirt out of the mud of the back lane. Arthur frowned slightly. He wished to have Le Mesurier to himself in order to discuss hunting plans. Had Lily been his wife, or his sister, he would have bluntly told her she was not wanted. As it was, he ignored her for several minutes, and talked across her to Le Mesurier.

The ferrets were in a wire-netting enclosure. At Arthur's whistle they came running out of their hutch, blinking with wild malicious eyes at the human beings, and poking their pink twitching noses through the wire.

"That yellow one's a topper," said Le Mesurier, showing animation for the first time.

"Not bad is he! Tell you what, we'll go ferretin' to-morrow morning."

"Do look at that little foxy one. It's biting the other.—Captain Montgomery, doesn't it remind you of somebody?" said Lily in an audible aside.

"Can't say it does. Who?"

"Cissie MacLeod of course. It's her living image," whispered Lily tittering.

The ferret was certainly the exact colour of Clytie's hair.

"By Jove," said Arthur laughing—"we must call her 'the ferret'."

"Oh no, reely now, that would be too bad! I can't bear nicknames. Besides, I shouldn't have said it. Captain Le Mesurier is quite shocked!"

She glanced at Le Mesurier's face which was even more impassive than usual, and saw with pleasure that he was annoyed.

"It's so odd meeting Cissie MacLeod again after all these years," went on Lily, who knew Clytie's name perfectly, but for some unexplained reason preferred at this moment to call her Cissie. "We were at school together you know, at the Mademoiselle Toussaints."

"At school with the ferret were you, when you were both deah little gurls," drawled Arthur, and the eye which was next to Lily winked slightly, as though to say—"Go on. Pull his leg about her!" He had resented the snub which Le Mesurier had given him with regard to Clytie the day before. . . . Besides, it always amused him to hear Lily talking about other women.

"I don't know about myself—I expect I was a little fiend like most schoolgirls!—but certainly we didn't think Cissie MacLeod a specially dear little girl in those days!"

"Oh, why?" asked Arthur.

"Well—she didn't wash for one thing. . . . And she was so spiteful too. . . . But it isn't quite fair, is it, to tell tales out of school—especially as she seems quite a decent sort now."

"Spiteful was she?"

"I should think she was! Just imagine, Captain Montgomery—there was one girl had a new fiddle she was awfully proud of; and what d'you think Cissie MacLeod did? She got hold of the fiddle on the sly, and cut the strings, and ruined it! When the girls discovered it was her who had done it, they—But I'm not going to tell you the rest of the story. Change the subject! What a lovely tree that is!"

"Oh come now, Miss Mackie. You can't switch off, just when you're gettin' interestin'! What did the other girls do?"

"Well, if you want to know, they went up to her room that night, and gave her a thorough good whipping. I must say it served her right. Of course I knew nothing about it till afterwards."

"By Jove! I never knew things like that happened in 'young ladies' seminaries!'—Where are you off to, Le Mesurier? This is the shortest way."

Captain Le Mesurier, who had remained completely silent during the foregoing conversation, had now left them, and was leisurely strolling away across the park.

"There now! I've shocked His Majesty! And it was all your fault. I didn't want to tell"—cried Lily.

Arthur seized her by the hand, and playfully twisted her little finger.

"Naughty—naughty. You know you simply loved givin' her away!" he said.

7

That evening, between the hours of six and seven-thirty, a solemn hush pervaded the reception rooms of Fairlees; drawing-room, hall and boudoir, all were deserted: only from the smoking-room came a sound of rustling newspapers and an occasional remark. The female portion of the party were all upstairs dressing for the ball.

In the performance of this important business, each followed

the bent of her own character. Mrs. Montgomery absent-mindedly fastened so many ornaments upon her matronly person, that she scintillated like a rockery in sunlight. Mrs. Campbell was severely but effectively gowned in a tight black velvet, with a little very good lace on the bodice. Ella, after much swithering as to whether she should wear her red chiffon or her yellow crêpe de chine, decided upon the red, but at the last minute ruined the effect by sticking a magenta flower in her hair as "a finishing touch". Clytie was seduced by a fascinating novel into reading before the fire until but fifteen minutes remained to do her hair and put on her white tulle frock, while the green wreath, which was to redeem her from obscurity, had to be left on the dressing-table, with a fervent hope that she might have time to pin it on after dinner. The Campbell girls gave their straight thick hair a thorough brushing, coiled it on the top of their heads, and pinned on hair-nets; hooked each other's solid satin dresses, and were quite ready to descend when the gong rang. Lily, on the contrary, dallied before her glass, dabbing violet powder on her nose and shoulders, critically admiring her coiffure which was a mass of dainty yellow curls (some of which had come out of a cardboard box); and returned from the head of the stairs to drench her handkerchief in Lily of the Valley scent. Finally she tripped downstairs, a radiant vision in pink and blue, evoking admiring whispers from the maids who were peeping over the bannisters; and entered the drawing-room—all smiles—a quarter of an hour late, to the silent indignation of Mr. Montgomery, who, almost before her pink satin shoe had crossed the threshold, was offering his arm to lead Mrs. Campbell to the dining-room.

At nine precisely, the large bus and the wagonette came round to the door. The young men climbed into the latter, while the ladies and the older gentlemen went inside the bus, and away they all drove through the misty November night. How different was this from the last time Lily had driven to a county ball, seated in a bus also it is true, but with a dashing officer on each side of her, the only chaperon present a gay young married woman, and the tedium of the drive beguiled by playing "Up Jenkins," and "Is Mrs. Brown at home?"—games which permitted, nay necessitated, much mingling of hands, without any due cause for protest. She was fain to console herself by thinking of the very different parties which should go from Fairlees, when the beautiful Mrs. Arthur Montgomery had the arranging of them.

The great drawing-room at Unthank was a scene of dignified animation. Innumerable wax candles blazed on the wall. Half

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the men wore the hunt facings, and there was a certain proportion of uniforms, and a kilt or so, to brighten the scene. A second glance, however, revealed the fact that the female element predominated. Fairlees was not the only party which had brought more maidens than men, and it was soon obvious that each dance must see several girls standing-out for lack of partners. Under those circumstances the older gentlemen from Fairlees did their duty manfully, securing a dance from each lady of their party before moving on to request certain dowagers of the neighbourhood to accompany them to supper. Not so Arthur, who, having drawn his pencil through the last eight dances of Lily's programme, and asked Janet Campbell for the Lancers, strolled away in search of outside partners for Lily.

"Arthur. . . Arthur dear!"—his mother's urgent whisper intercepted him as he was passing by.— "People seem dancing very much in their own parties to-night. You will make a point of asking all the young ladies we brought with us, will you not?"

Thus cornered, Captain Montgomery replied in a drawling voice—"I'll do what I can, mater . . . but I must look after Miss Mackie you know. The other girls know people. She doesn't."

"But indeed my dear, Miss MacLeod hardly knows a soul in the room. And this is little Nettie's first ball. I am counting upon your introducing them to some of the officers from Newcastle——"

"I'm afraid I can't promise to do that, mater. I know them quite slightly myself—and all those fellows have their own partners. If Mrs. Campbell chooses to bring three daughters, I think she must look after them herself. However, if you like I'll dance this with Marion Campbell."

He accordingly moved across to that young lady, averting his eyes from Lily, who, from her position by the door, cast him an appealing glance. It was a new experience for Lily to be without a partner. At the Glasgow festivities she had always enjoyed a *succès fou*; but she had now to learn that at a county ball dancing goes by acquaintance rather than by favour. Her cheeks began to burn with mortification and astonishment when the various gentlemen of the neighbourhood, having secured dances from Ella and the older Campbell girls, walked away without expressing any desire to be introduced to the lovely stranger by the door. With extreme resentment she noticed that, although Mrs. Montgomery and Ella were bestirring themselves to find partners for Clytie and Nettie, they seemed content to leave Lily's programme to Arthur's rather intermittent care.

It would scarcely have been human nature at nineteen, had Clytie not felt a flicker of satisfaction when, dancing herself, she first saw her enemy in the position of a wallflower: but when this occurred a second time, the generosity which was one of the strongest elements in her character, made her earnestly desire to find Lily a partner. At the end of the dance she got an opportunity, as her partner inquired who the very pretty girl in pink could be. The introduction was effected, and the remaining gaps in Lily's programme were filled. The gentleman, however, was only the Duke's land agent, and having discovered this, Lily felt she had little reason to be grateful to Clytie. She had distinctly heard Mrs. Montgomery introducing Clytie MacLeod to a *Lord* somebody! a little before, but of course Clytie had taken precious care not to introduce *him* to her old school friend. However, her programme was now full, which was the great thing; and the fact that Arthur should have engaged her for the last eight dances seemed a happy augury of a more important engagement.

An eminent Scotch preacher once raised something very like a laugh in his kirk by observing that there were more tears after one ball than a dozen funerals! And certainly, owing to the disproportion of the sexes at the Unthank ball, it is probable that at least as much mortification as pleasure resulted, that is to say as far as the young ladies were concerned. In vain did Mrs. Campbell, laying aside her customary hauteur, move smiling about the room in search of partners for her youngest daughter. The debut of poor Nettie—whose eyes had at first seemed about to start from her head with pleasure and excitement at the lights and music—was all but a complete failure. Gentlemen who were already dancing with the two elder Campbells saw no need to add a third to their programmes; the utmost efforts of Mrs. Montgomery and Ella only found her an occasional partner; and the pleasure of her sisters was dashed by seeing her so constantly seated by her mother's side.

Clytie, however, contrary to her expectations, had done well from the beginning; and the partners to whom she was engaged found her without difficulty, as her red head with its green garland made her a "kenspeckle" object in the room. She was wholeheartedly rejoicing in the novel sensation of being a social success, when, some time about midnight, a blank in her programme obliged her to join Nettie in the group of wallflowers.

"Don't let's stand here, Nettie. Do come and sit out somewhere," she suggested presently.

"There's nowhere for us to sit."

"There are lots of chairs in the next room——"

Nettie looked uneasy.

"I think we had better wait here till mamma comes back from supper. None of the other girls go walking about by themselves."

"But there's no sense in standing here against the wall, when there's no one for us to dance with. If we were men we'd go to the smoking-room."

"But we aren't men . . . and we don't smoke."

"It doesn't matter. Come to supper then——"

But Nettie, with the melancholy resolution of a Casabianca, repeated—"We had better stay here. I am sure mamma wouldn't like us to walk about by ourselves."

Clytie felt so irritated that she did not trust herself to speak, and they remained in silence side by side. Janet waltzed past them with Mr. Nisbet, smiling as she went by. Then came Lily and Arthur, Lily's head almost lying on his shoulder, while her left hand held her chiffon skirt so high, that an elaborate silk petticoat was visible, and even an occasional glimpse of the frills of a more intimate garment.

Another dance was half-way through, and still Mrs. Campbell had not returned. Clytie's sympathy for Nettie began to be lost in a feeling of profound pity for herself. No pleasure which she had felt during the earlier part of the dance, could compensate for the self-consciousness and dreariness of the present moment. Fixing her eyes resolutely on the opposite side of the room, she had presently the mortification of realising that the two insignificant and forlorn figures standing there were—herself and Nettie, reflected in a long mirror. . . .

It was at this moment that Captain Le Mesurier, who had spent some dances in the smoking-room talking to a brother officer, appeared in the doorway of the ballroom, with the serene and contented expression on his face of a man who, after some hours of forced abstinence from smoking, has just enjoyed a good cigar. His eye fell upon Nettie Campbell, and his impulse was to retreat, for he had already danced with her, and marvelled that so slight a creature should hang like lead upon his arm. "I can't possibly dance with her again," he reflected, and was about to slip away, when Nettie shifted her position, and he saw Clytie, standing with tightly closed lips, and head held rather high.

At the sight of her, a feeling of tenderness, which was both new and painful, seemed to grip his heart. Without attempting to

explain to himself why he felt this, he went up to her, and in silence offered her his arm.

As they went along the passage, Clytie's eyes, which, since his appearance, had been like a pool in a hill glen on which the sun's rays have suddenly fallen, became clouded again. Her steps flagged. She glanced uncertainly up at him.

"Captain Le Mesurier, as we aren't going to dance—*would* you mind asking Nettie Campbell too? We could all sit out together——"

Le Mesurier raised his eyebrows slightly. "I think *not*"—he said.

"I thought perhaps—as it's her first ball—you wouldn't mind——"

"I do mind," said Le Mesurier, glancing down at her with a smile, and leading her through the great drawing-room and into the conservatory beyond.

"All right. . . . Only it seems jolly mean to come and sit out here, and leave Nettie standing there all alone," murmured Clytie.

"It's just the luck of the ball," answered Le Mesurier imperturbably, making his way to two arm-chairs which were placed close together in an arbour of greenery.

They sat down, and there was a brief silence.

"May I smoke?"

"Yes—Do."

He struck a match, and for a moment his pale clean-cut face, his hair carefully brushed to conceal premature baldness, the gold lace upon the collar of his blue Hussar's uniform, were vividly illuminated. The match went out, and they were in the twilight again.

"Well?" said Le Mesurier at last, blowing out a blue cloud of smoke which eddied up among the palm fronds—"I'll give a penny for your thoughts, Miss MacLeod."

"I—I *hate* balls!" burst out Clytie; "I think they're all wrong somehow—everybody just thinking about themselves, and not minding about anyone else."

After a pause, during which he smoked reflectively, Captain Le Mesurier answered—"Well—life's like that, you know".

"I don't believe it is. People aren't like this at other times. . . . Only at a ball. . . . I don't like it."

"You don't like sitting out here with me? A—thanks."

"You know I didn't mean that. I do like it, very much. . . . And I simply love the dancing. . . . But there's always some girl standing out—and that spoils everything. . . . I've only been to

one ball before this,—and Aunt Cecily was ill and couldn't come . . . and I didn't know almost anybody. . . . It's different to-night.—All the same, I don't think I want to go to any more balls."

"What a remarkable sentiment for a young lady of eighteen!"

"I'm not eighteen. I'm nearly twenty! . . . Captain Le Mesurier—You don't know what it feels like to stand out. You feel as if everybody was looking at you. And you get wretched and wretched, until at last—if Judas Iscariot came and asked you to dance, you'd say 'thanks very much!'"

"This is rather interesting. I didn't know girls felt like that."

"I do anyhow. And I'm sure it's all wrong. At other times I don't want people to come and talk to me, unless they want to.—I simply don't care. . . . But at balls I want them to dance with me—just frightfully!"

"But surely *you* haven't any difficulty"—began Le Mesurier, then paused abruptly, for a couple were approaching their arbour. A well-known voice drawled, "Oh dear!—Our nice place has been taken, Captain Montgomery."

At the sound of Lily's voice, Clytie's face had involuntarily assumed an expression as if she had just swallowed nasty medicine.

"What a nice girl Miss Mackie is," remarked Le Mesurier, lighting another cigarette. "It's true she can't ride, but she does look topping in a ball-room.—Such a jolly petticoat she's got on too! . . . Most attractive— isn't she?"

At this moment, a poignant realisation of the power of sex—that glamour which apparently made Lily's tinsel shine like gold, while it passed people like herself and Nettie by—seemed to pierce through Clytie's heart, which throbbed with angry pain, then felt as heavy as lead. She remained silent. Then suddenly afraid that he might guess her thoughts, she answered gushingly—"The sweetest girl! I simply love her!"

"A—yes, of course you were at school together."

Clytie's expression changed. "Those dear old days!" she murmured, but this time her tone lacked conviction. Was it *possible* that even Lily could have. . . .

"I'm sure you were friends even then. Tell me something about your school, Miss MacLeod."

"—The music has begun again. We ought to go back."

"I believe I'm dancing this with Miss Mackie too. It would never do to keep *her* waiting," he remarked, without moving.

"Then let us go at once!" cried Clytie, springing to her feet.

She was detained by a hand catching hold of the corner of her tulle tunic. With startled eyes she looked down at him. He let it go at once.

"Sit down again—please. You can't leave your partner sitting here alone. It isn't done. . . ."

"But—if you're engaged to Miss Mackie——"

"I'm engaged to you . . . for the rest of the evening," he murmured, looking steadily at her flushed face. He held out his hand, and took her programme from her. With quiet deliberation, he tore it into small pieces. After an involuntary movement of protest, her amazed and fascinated eyes watched him carefully burying the fragments at the foot of the nearest palm. He drew out his handkerchief, and flicked the earth off his fingers; then looked up at her, and smiled.

"You're going away to-morrow. Please dance with me to-night"—he said.

The distant strain of the "Barcarolle" was filling the scented air of the conservatory with its throbbing sweetness. As we already know, the emotional effect of music upon Clytie was great . . . and now everything seemed to have become subtly different; the ordinary world, the future—even the past—existed no longer: the present was the only reality. . . . With an effort to break the spell, to move and talk naturally, she turned towards him, but finding his eyes fixed upon her, with a strange expression in them—almost as if a fire was glowing through their customary indifference—she turned her face away again in confusion and agitation.—"Please don't stare at me. It makes me shy"—that was what she would have liked to say, with a laugh to show that she was half in jest; but her lips refused to utter a sound. They were sitting side by side, their chairs close together, and, as he bent forward to throw away his cigarette, his arm touched hers, and continued to touch it. . . . At the contact of the cloth against her bare skin, a new and bewildering sensation passed through Clytie. Something within her seemed to desire that he should take her hand and draw her to him . . . while her own old self knew that if he did so, she would almost die of shame. . . . Meantime the distant music, piercingly sweet and innocently voluptuous, seemed to mesmerise her into complete passivity.

A low, rather unsteady voice, murmured—"Chère petite enfant." . . . As she answered nothing, a hand was stretched out to take hers. She sat motionless and trembling, unable to prevent him. . . . Then suddenly the music stopped. There was a sound of voices and laughter in the drawing-room; and

couple after couple, chattering and fanning their flushed faces, poured into the conservatory.

Captain Le Mesurier leaned back, then rose to his feet. His face had resumed its ordinary expression of indifference.

"We might dance this. It's the Eton boating song. We can have supper after it," he said.

CHAPTER VI

ROBIN LE MESURIER

"There cam' a braw wooer tae oor ha' door"

I

NEXT day the Fairlees house-party broke up. The ending of ten days' enforced association, not infrequently brings with it a sensation of relief; but on this occasion three, at least, of the departing guests, silently regretted it.

To Janet Campbell the last week had seemed irradiated by the glow of a quiet but true romance; and for years after, a reflection of this feeling was to return to her, whenever she spoke of "that delightful visit at Fairlees". On the other hand, Clytie was unwilling to ask herself whether she was as glad to return to Brocksden as she had expected to be. On the morning after the dance, Captain Le Mesurier's manner at breakfast had been as calm and unconcerned as in the early days of the visit. He had neither spoken to nor looked at her, and their good-byes had been formal on both sides. To admit that this could mortify her, would have been the crowning mortification; and, as she journeyed with the Campbells towards Berwick, she talked to her companions, looked out of the window at the cold North sea, even read the newspaper—a thing which she detested—and resolutely refused to inquire into the exact state of her feelings.

Lily was certainly the guest who most poignantly regretted the close of the visit. The ten days were over, the ball was past, and Arthur had not spoken! . . . If only she could stay on, even a few hours more, after the other people left, it might make all the difference. She discovered, therefore, that the afternoon train was more convenient for Glasgow; but this theory was ruthlessly exploded by Mr. Nisbet, who produced a time-table, and conclusively proved that it would mean spending a night en route in Edinburgh; and, while Lily murmured polite thanks, she could have bitten him!

She made the best of a disappointing situation however. She reappeared after breakfast in a bewitching travelling dress of grey corduroy; and was both charming and correct in her farewells, declaring, with sincerity, that it was very sad to be leaving "dear Fairlees," and hoping that Ella and "her brother" would come and stay with them for some of the Glasgow balls. In her satisfaction at seeing her dangerous guest depart before anything irrevocable had occurred, Mrs. Montgomery was almost cordial; and this change in her manner encouraged Lily to hope that, although she must leave Fairlees now, it might not be long before she was invited again.

2

"I believe I see Mrs. Mappett and Rose coming across the lawn," said Lady Cecily one afternoon in the middle of December, when early dusk had interrupted Clytie's reading aloud, and they were sitting waiting for the lamps. "Let them in by the balcony—or no, perhaps I had better not risk having the window opened this raw afternoon. . . . Well, do not trouble. Pretty will let them in by the front door. . . ." But Clytie had already gone, and a minute later Mrs. Mappett bustled into the room with such a significant expression of having news to impart, that Lady Cecily, who was accustomed to being confided in with regard to Mrs. Mappett's maternal expectations, involuntarily ejaculated to herself "Another?—Already!"

Clytie, who disliked Mrs. Mappett so much that she never willingly remained in her company, had carried Rose off to see the chrysanthemums which were now in their heyday, so that the greenhouses were a blaze of yellow and tawny, russet, lilac, and white. As a rule Rose would have burst into admiration over their size and beauty; but to-day she seemed distraught, and followed Clytie through the successive glass-houses, which were filled with a delicate pungent fragrance, in silence.

When at last they paused beside the shelves where the show chrysanthemums stood, Rose murmured,

"Clytie—I want to tell you something."

"How interesting. What is it?"

"I—I'm engaged to be married, Clytie."

"Rose! Oh! . . . How extraordinary, how thrilling! Oh do tell me. Who to?"

"I daresay—that is you haven't been anywhere lately, or you might have heard something. . . . Mr.—he—he's been at

LOVE IN A MIST

Langlea more and more lately . . . and mother said—but I didn't know what to think, Clytie. I couldn't believe it at first." Rose had laid hold of a huge yellow chrysanthemum, and was twisting it about in a manner which would have roused anguish in the breast of Mr. Wilson, who had sacrificed all the other buds to achieve its immense, plutocratic curliness. . . . "But last night,—at least it was six o'clock, and he had to get back for his young men's class. I was helping him to light his lamp on the gravel . . . and suddenly it happened."

"But Rose——"

"And he said he would have spoken weeks ago, only—that some girls give a man lots of encouragement without meaning anything. . . . Besides he wanted to be quite sure of his own feelings first, and now he was, absolutely. . . . And I said 'Yes,' and he said 'Thank God, my darling'—just like that, Clytie. . . . So we went in and told mother, and she was so surprised, and asked him to stay to dinner. . . . And Clytie—it was so funny, all through dinner I kept calling him 'Mr. Milbanke'! And he said, No—it must always be Arthur now. And he wrote off for the ring—diamonds and sapphires—won't that be pretty?—this very morning."

"—Mr. Milbanke!" gasped Clytie.

"Arthur now"—said Rose simply.

Clytie turned and began mechanically walking away down the row of prize chrysanthemums. Her face was red with agitation. She did not know what to do. Mr. Milbanke! Mr. Milbanke who had told her his heart was broken, and had bicycled away, *crying*, not four months ago—and now he dared to think he could marry Rose, dear Rose, who was worth a hundred of him with her loving loyal gentle nature. Oh, how could she? He would touch her with his horrid damp podgy hands, and kiss her . . . probably he had already kissed her. . . . No, it was too dreadful. It must be stopped——

"Clytie," cried Rose, timidly hastening after her, "dear Clytie, *please* don't be angry at my not having told you sooner. I simply couldn't have spoken about him before—not even to you. And I shall love you just the same, you know——"

Clytie whirled round and took both her hands.

"Oh Rose, it isn't that. Of course you couldn't tell me before it happened! . . . Only—I can't feel he's good enough for you. Rose darling—are you perfectly certain?"

Rose, who had been shyly looking away from Clytie, raised a face which was blushing and smiling and almost crying all at

the same time. . . . "Quite certain. Quite, quite certain," she whispered, and into her child-like blue eyes came for a second an expression of such bewildered happiness, that Clytie's passionate remonstrance died on her lips, and she kissed her in silence.

For a minute they stood holding each other's hands.

"You love him?" murmured Clytie at last.

"Oh Clytie," answered Rose, "how could anyone help it if they really knew him? He's so clever, there isn't any book scarcely he hasn't read. And he's so strong and manly. . . . Mother says so too, and lots of people, so it isn't just me. The people in Lammerton simply adore him. . . . And he's so *good*. I feel I can trust him so utterly. . . . And, oh Clytie—he wants us to be married as soon after Christmas as he can get someone to take the charge for him. He says he can't bear to wait any longer." . . . Bursting into tears she added, "—And don't think I am crying because I'm not happy. . . . It's just all so wonderful—I can't help it."

Let us return to the drawing-room. Mrs. Mappett had scarcely seated herself, before—after remarking that she need not enquire how Lady Cecily was, as she could see at a glance she was better—(At this Lady Cecily, who considered herself distinctly worse, stiffened.) she began to unfold her news. She had something to tell Lady Cecily, something most interesting, though not perhaps quite unexpected. Here she paused for the sake of effect, whereupon Lady Cecily murmured—"Dear Mrs. Mappett, I believe I can guess".

"What? Somebody has told you—already?—How things get about!" cried Mrs. Mappett, delighted and disappointed in one breath.

"Oh no indeed. But—er—is it?—"

"Yes, dear Lady Cecily. It is quite true. Our dear Rose is going to be married!"

"Really. How very nice. And pray who is the fortunate man?" asked Lady Cecily with a rather forced cordiality.

"Can't you guess?" said Mrs. Mappett with eyebrows archly raised: but as Lady Cecily apparently could not, she was obliged, after a little more mystery, to tell her.

"Mr. Milbanke?" Dear me, how *very* nice. Such an excellent young man; and to have dear Rose settled near you. I do most heartily congratulate you."

Lady Cecily had been dreading to hear that Rose had captured one of the very few eligible lairds of the neighbourhood. Since

this was not the case, she was ready to listen with sympathetic interest to all Mrs. Mappett had to tell her. Tactfully she refrained from asking who his people were; and later on with her own hand she wrote down the address of a wholesale place in Ireland for the linen.

As it was long since there had been a wedding in the neighbourhood it naturally became the principal topic of conversation. Mrs. Mappett, radiant and important, received a string of callers, and, in spite of the many labours which so speedy a wedding involved, found time to run over frequently to Brocksden to inform Lady Cecily how things were going. The invalid was at first interested in every detail, from the Edinburgh trousseau to the solid silver desert service which was the gift of Mr. Milbanke senior. Presently however Mrs. Mappett's raptures began to pall on her. A slight unpleasantness arose over the bridesmaids' dresses. They were to be white, with bunches of holly in their fur toques and muffs. As this would certainly not suit her red-headed Clytie, Lady Cecily objected, and in the end her suave inflexibility won the day, and tawny chrysanthemums were substituted; but Mrs. Mappett, who had pictured her own fair-haired daughters looking charming under their holly, was rather sore about it.

The betrothal of Rose, even to so middle class a suitor, was bound to raise in Lady Cecily a poignant realisation that Clytie remained unsought. A few years more and the charm, the intangible lure which youth and innocence cast over even irregular features and odd colouring, would have vanished; and with those gone, the probability was that she might not marry at all. "The changing beauties of the pilgrim face" meant nothing to Lady Cecily. With nervous irritability she nagged incessantly at Clytie over her carelessness with regard to her dress and appearance. At other times her mind busied itself with projects of a London season, although she knew well that Sir Peter's dislike to leaving Brocksden, and her own indifferent health, would probably bring it to nought. Clytie was sad at the marriage of her only real girl friend to a man whom she disliked; so altogether things were not very harmonious at Brocksden.

One dull afternoon a few days before Christmas, Clytie and her aunt were sitting in the drawing-room longing for tea to appear, when that sound was heard which on a wet day in the country is both stimulating and agreeable, the ringing of the front door bell.

"Now who can that be I wonder. Not Mrs. Mappett again surely? She would hardly walk over with the roads in this con-

dition. Perhaps it is the Maxwells, or can it be the minister come to see about the petticoats and tea for the old women? If it is, I am afraid I must ask you to see him in the boudoir, Clytie. I do not feel up to making lists to-day."

"Miss Mappett. Mr. Milbanke," announced the butler.

"How do you do, Rose dear. How do you do, Mr. Milbanke. It is really brave of you to come over on such a day. The roads. . . . Clytie, will you ask Pretty to bring tea at once."

Clytie was only too happy to escape from the room, for, although she had met Mr. Milbanke several times since his engagement, it was impossible for her to feel at ease in his presence, and his manner towards her seemed to her insufferable with its mixture of coldness and condescension. It was but a momentary respite however, for she met Pretty and his satellite on the landing, laden with trays and cakes.

"Yes, I have indeed been fortunate in securing Mr. Anderson to take my duties a week earlier than I had hoped," Mr. Milbanke was informing Lady Cecily.

"Oh Clytie, I love your pendant more and more every time I look at it. It's too lovely for words, and so quaint. I always loved enamel. . . ."

"Do you take sugar, Mr. Milbanke?"

"Thank you—er—thank you, Miss MacLeod. As I was saying, Lady Cecily, it was not an easy task to decide where to go in this wintry weather; but as Rose has luckily never seen London . . ."

"Four more presents to-day, Clytie. Pepper pots from the Smiths—such charming ones, like little dice and the pepper comes out through the holes; and a lovely silver box from Mrs. Moir and—er—another silver box, only not quite the same, from the Haddows; and a lovely bound copy of Omar Khayyam from kind Miss Tippingue."

"Yes indeed. We are feathering our nest at the expense of our kind friends, Lady Cecily. Aren't we, Rosie?" said Mr. Milbanke, caressing Rose's hand under the transparent edging of the lace tea cloth.

"Do you know, I believe I hear a motor!" exclaimed Lady Cecily.

Everybody listened. The fact was undoubted, nor did it need the ringing of the front door bell for the second time to confirm it. Who could it be? "Really this is quite exciting—two sets of callers on such an afternoon," said Lady Cecily. There was a slight interval during which all eyes were fixed on the door.

It opened, and the small smart fashionably dressed figure of young Lady Ord from the Castle was seen, while behind her came a tall good-looking and very self-possessed young man.

"How do you do, Lady Cecily. *How* are you?—I do hope better. May I introduce Captain Le Mesurier. How do you do, Clytie; how do you do, Miss Mappett. How do *you* do, Mr. Milbanke."

As all seated themselves again, Clytie was furiously conscious that her face was like fire, and her heart beating in a most uncalled for manner. Mechanically she busied herself in making fresh tea; and allowed it its due period to infuse, before emerging from the shelter of the kettle to carry a cup to Lady Ord. Before she had gone a step, it was quietly taken from her.

"Oh pray allow me," exclaimed Mr. Milbanke, who had previously allowed Clytie to wait upon Rose and himself, without any protest.

Arming himself with the scone dish, he followed Captain Le Mesurier across the room; and as he did so it seemed to Clytie that a curious and ludicrous alteration had taken place in him. His face seemed fatter, his hands and ears redder, his whole figure more plebeian than before. Glancing involuntarily towards Rose to see if she too had perceived this transformation, she saw, with relief and irritation, that her eyes were fixed admiringly upon her lover. . . . What a good thing she noticed nothing. And yet—how was it possible, however much you were in love, not to see the difference between a well-bred gentleman and—a Mr. Milbanke!

3

"Thank Goodness—nobody come yet," said Lady Ord glancing at the clock, and then past it at her own pretty face in the Sheraton mirror. "That clock's wrong anyhow. It can't be as late as that or Jane Mappett would have been here ten minutes ago. That sort of person is always so horribly punctual."

She cast an absent eye over the tea-table shining with massive family silver: picked a grape off the opulent purple bunch—grapes were a feature of teas at the Castle—and returned to the pleasing study of her own reflection. She was wearing one of those Paris gowns which made all heads discreetly turn towards her when she swept late, but unabashed, into church; and which certain ladies of the neighbourhood considered "Very smart of course, but rather over-dressed, don't you think, for the country?" Lady

Ord, however, was troubled by no doubts as to the invariable success of her appearance. She gazed at herself with a smile of naïve delight, then, hearing female voices in the hall below, she sighed and wished she had not asked the "wives of the guns" to tea. Her slender ankles ached with unaccustomed walking through the boggy woods—and Teddie had been so tiresome too, critical of the lunch, cross with the beaters, snubbing to herself. Naturally he was furious at Bob Le Mesurier doing such a queer thing as insisting on walking to the meet, the morning the big covert was being shot. But why snub *her*? It wasn't her fault. Besides, if Teddie didn't know by now that Bob always did exactly as he liked. . . . Most extraordinary thing, a man like Bob Le Mesurier running after Clytie MacLeod as he had been doing all this week. She *would* like to know if anything would come of it. Teddie had been too much out of temper at her telling Jamie Home (who had only come to beat) that they were a gun short, so that he could shoot too, to be willing to discuss it with her; for after all, saying "Nonsense! Nonsense! Men in the 3rd Hussars don't marry girls with crooked noses!" did not at all explain the matter. Poor Teddie—he did so hate seeing things wounded, and as luck would have it, Jamie Home had been next him in the two best beats. Still, she didn't think he need have gone on being cross all day about it, when he must know that she had only asked Jamie because she *liked* boys to enjoy their holidays, and had no idea that one bad shot would spoil the day's bag. . . . A little wistfully she wondered whether Bob Le Mesurier would be as cross as that with little Clytie when they had been married seven years—that is if he really meant to marry her. In the days when Teddie was courting her, his manners had been just as gentle and charming as——

But at this point her meditations were interrupted, for everybody began to arrive for tea.

After a long day's shooting your country gentleman is not tempted to linger long by any alien tea-table, not even if he has changed his wet stockings previously, nor even if he has the prettiest woman in the county for his hostess. In less than an hour's time therefore, various vehicles were making their way homewards along their respective dark and muddy roads.

In the Home's old but comfortable brougham, Mrs. Home, very proud and happy to have her hobbledehoy opposite her, was saying—

"And so you had a happy day, Jim?"

"Oh yes mother, simply grand. And do you know.

believe I'm getting into it at last. Don't you think I am, father? I couldn't hit a thing at first, of course, but later on I got two, and I think I hit several more. They'll perhaps be picked up to-morrow. Besides I'm pretty sure one at least of the hares was mine, only Sir Edward's dog brought them all to him——"

"I daresay. Those mistakes happen sometimes," said Mr. Home, who really believed nothing of the sort, but, having noticed Sir Edward's annoyance at poor Jamie's sorry performance, was willing to acquiesce in a little mild criticism of him.

"How very fortunate for you, Jim, Captain Le Mesurier failing at the last minute like that. . . . Did you hear what Lady Ord was saying, Robert—that she thought he had gone to the meet because Clytie MacLeod was to be there. Now wouldn't it be delightful if something came of that?"

"All the same, my dear, Le Mesurier had no right to come to stay for the shoot, and then leave Ord in the lurch."

"I think it was jolly kind of Lady Ord to ask me to shoot instead of him. I say mother she *is* pretty, and I think she's the jolliest woman I've ever met."

Meantime in the Mappett's dogcart the same topic was being discussed, but under less comfortable circumstances. The Colonel, although he had been well placed in all the beats, and had been shooting well, was invariably irritable after a long day's exercise. Mrs. Mappett's nose was red with cold, and her seal-skin coat seemed to let the wind through in a way that it had never done twenty years ago. In the back seat Rose, a little disconsolate, was wondering why Lady Ord had not asked Arthur.

"I can't believe there is a word of truth in it. What a place the Castle is for gossip! Never do I go there without Lady Ord having some wonderful new tale to tell—and as often as not nothing in it," said Mrs. Mappett.

"A man doesn't miss the Castle covert shoot for nothing. And to follow the hounds *on foot* too!—I don't suppose that young man has ever condescended to do such a thing in his life before. It seems too that he offered himself to the Ords for this week, and then calmly announced this morning that he hadn't brought a gun! If I had been Ord——"

"Well, whatever brings him here, I cannot believe it can be Clytie MacLeod. The last person in the world to make a conquest of that sort, even if she did meet him in Northumberland, and we have only Lady Ord's word for it that she did. You may depend upon it, Gregory, it is all a ridiculous mistake!"

—None of all the neighbourhood the Maxwells owned a motor;

they were therefore nearly at the little town of Lammerton before the other departing guests had got out of the Castle avenue. The occupants of the motor were purely feminine, Molly Maxwell driving it herself, and her mother and sister sitting behind.

"Stop at Dodd's, please Molly. We must pick up the short-bread and a currant loaf."

The smooth tyres skidded slightly as they passed over the wet cobbles of Castle Street. In the single window of a small grocer's shop a kerosene lamp cast its garish light upon the sprigs of holly and mistletoe with which the owner had decorated her mixed wares, which consisted mainly of gundy and bootlaces. In the marketplace, however, the shops were larger, and the unofficial window of the post-office presented a bewildering variety of Christmas and New Year's cards, of "presents from Lammerton," and other seasonable gifts.

They drew up at the baker's, and the younger girl ran into the pleasantly warm bread atmosphere of the shop. After a considerable longer interval than seemed necessary to conclude her purchases, she came out again, agog with tidings.

"Mother—what *do* you think Miss Dodd was telling me?—Clytie and Captain Le Mesurier had tea there alone together this afternoon!"

"What's that you say, Dolly? *Do* talk more distinctly. I can't hear a word"—cried Molly from the driver's seat.

"My dear Molly, suppose you look where you are going when you are driving through the village in the dark. Put the rug under your feet, Dolly. . . . *Sit* on it. All the cold air is coming in on your side. . . . And now if you have anything of interest to unfold——"

"It is frightfully interesting, mother. Just listen—They came there—walking, about dark, so they must have been running together all day——"

"But who?—who came?" asked Molly crossly.

"Clytie MacLeod and that Captain Le Mesurier—who's staying at the Castle, you know"—Dolly's voice rose above the whirring of the motor and the sougling of the wind.—"Lady Ord began to say something about it at tea, but Sir Peter came in, so of course she had to stop. And now Miss Dodd tells me they walked in together at about five and ordered tea, and sat there over it ever so long. Miss Dodd could talk of nothing else, I could hardly get her to tie up the currant loaf for me! She told me she knew he must be Miss MacLeod's young man, for she had seen him every day lately riding down the street to Brocksden. And just

think, Molly—she was quite proud of herself because she had told the girl to be sure not to go into the room without knocking first ! ”

Mrs. Maxwell shivered, and drew the fur rug up to her double chin.

“Under the circumstances let us hope that something will come of it,” she remarked.

Meantime two figures were parting in Brocksden avenue.

“Will you really not come in?—and have a whisky and soda, or something”—said Clytie.

“No thanks. I had better get back.”

“Well good-bye. Thanks awfully for the tea and bringing me home. It’s been a grand day. I’m sure we’ve been nearly twenty miles.”

She turned towards the house, weary, muddy, footsore, her face glowing with exercise.

“Miss MacLeod. . . . I shall come over to Brocksden tomorrow, some time after lunch. Shall you be free then ? ”

“Of course I will. Do come. I’ll tell you what, Captain Le Mesurier, Johnnie and I can take you to the big wood. It is such a jolly place.”

There was a pause before Le Mesurier said deliberately.

“A—no. I want to see you alone.”

“I don’t know.—Perhaps Aunt Cecily may need me,” faltered Clytie, scarcely knowing what she was answering.

Another pause. Then—“I shall be here at about three,” said Le Mesurier.

“Well—good night. I must be going in,” cried Clytie, and sped away across the gravel to the house.

Her heart was beating with agitated joy, and fear, and indecision.

4

“I’m not complaining,” said Johnnie in a grumbling voice, “but I must say I think it’s hard if I can’t do what I want in my short holidays.”

“Dear boy, be reasonable—” but Lady Cecily’s tone lacked conviction, for she was conscious her son had some cause for complaint. Being herself engaged to drive over to inspect Rose’s trousseau, she had persuaded Johnnie to stay at home to chaperon Clytie and Captain Le Mesurier at tea. The weather had obliged her at the last minute to put off her little expedition, and Johnnie was consequently indignant at his wasted afternoon.

"It isn't very reasonable to have stopped me taking my motor bike to Lammerton to have that valve seen to, when you know that to-morrow's the town holiday, and the shop'll be shut. I can't ride it as it is, so it means wasting two days!"

"I am sorry dear—but indeed I don't *care* for your riding on those inuddy roads. I cannot believe it is safe——"

"Oh very well then. I suppose you'd rather my valuable bicycle lay unmended until it was ruined?"

There was a pause during which Johnnie tramped across the room and gave a cross tug at the bell.

"I suppose we can start our tea anyhow—or must we wait till Clytie and that fellow come in.—Poor things. Why shouldn't they have tea by themselves if they want to?"

Lady Cecily waited until the servants had finished setting out the tea things. Then, having provided her son with a perfectly made cup of tea, she said in a persuasive but serious tone—

"Johnnie—Clytie is almost a sister to you now, isn't she, dear;—and it is just at times like this that a brother can be of much assistance in little ways——"

"Well really!—if Captain Le Mesurier can't make up his mind to ask her to marry him, without my being there to help him——"

"My *dear* Johnnie, you speak—really—so foolishly sometimes. You know quite well that I meant nothing of the sort . . . but er, one cannot be too careful of a young girl's dignity on occasions like this. What would the servants think if they saw Clytie and Captain Le Mesurier having tea alone together? Captain Le Mesurier himself might think the less of her, if I permitted such an unsuitable thing——"

"Well, considering that they were out together the whole day yesterday——"

"That was quite different. That was a mere accident. Clytie drove to the meet with you. She had no idea Captain Le Mesurier was to be there. At the same time, dear, you did wrong to leave them as you did."

"All jolly well, but what about me? I *hate* running with the hounds, and I might as well not have bought my motor bike if I'm never to be able to use it."

Lady Cecily sighed, and sipped her tea with a plaintive expression. As years went on she found her Johnnie increasingly difficult to manipulate, and she sometimes nearly harboured the disloyal thought that it might be easier if he were more like other boys.

In the middle of a fresh dispute as to whether it would be possible to return by motor bicycle to Eton, a plan which Lady

Cecily considered inadmissible, Pretty appeared and began to remove the tea things.

"Do not take away the tea, Pretty. Miss Clytie has not come in yet."

"I beg pardon, my Lady. I understood Miss Clytie had had her tea. She came in an hour ago."

"An hour ago!"—exclaimed Lady Cecily: then recollecting herself she added, "You had better tell Miss Clytie that tea is ready then."

Johnnie had settled himself down by the fire, and was turning the pages of a "Strand Magazine".

"If you really think it essential to take your bicycle to Lammer-ton-to-day"—hinted Lady Cecily, who was now anxious to get rid of him.

"It's too late now. Matthews would be shut."

The door opened and Clytie came in, with a pale, self-conscious face, and eyes which avoided meeting those of her aunt.

"But where is Captain Le Mesurier? What have you done with him?" said Lady Cecily archly.

"He's gone back to the Castle."

"Without having any tea? My dear Clytie—Where was your sense of hospitality?"

"He didn't want any tea."

A pang of misgiving shot through Lady Cecily. She restrained herself however, and poured out Clytie's tea.

"—That is rather unfortunate. I wished to send a message to Lady Ord. . . . However I daresay Captain Le Mesurier will be over to-morrow."

"I don't think he will. He—is going away to-morrow."

"But indeed I assure you, my dear, he is doing nothing of the sort. He told me only last night that he hoped to stay at the Castle at least two weeks."

"No, Aunt Cecily. He goes to-morrow."

After this there was a strained silence, during which Clytie drank her tepid tea almost feverishly, and Lady Cecily sat upright and motionless on the sofa.

At last Johnnie, subconsciously aware of some disturbing element in the atmosphere, put down his magazine, yawned, and tramped out of the room.

Clytie was attempting to follow him, when her aunt turned to her and exclaimed in a tone of agitated displeasure—"Do not imagine that I cannot see that something has happened—but I suppose as usual you intend to tell me nothing!"

"Nothing has happened—that you would want to hear about"—said Clytie, looking as if she were with difficulty preventing herself from bursting into tears.

"Very well, Clytie. Very well. I have no wish to force your confidence. I have only tried to fill the place of a mother to you all these years, so have of course no right to know anything of your affairs." Poor Lady Cecily took up her embroidery as though to end the conversation; but after a moment she burst out—"But I must say if Captain Le Mesurier has gone away without even saying good-bye to your uncle and myself, after the hospitality we have shown him—it is not very polite."

"Oh Aunt Cecily. What do you want me to tell you? He is not like that. . . . He—he did ask me to marry him—this afternoon he asked me. But I couldn't. I just couldn't. . . . So he went away." . . .

Lady Cecily's cheeks were quite red, and her complacent and amiable eyes seemed to have turned into needles.

"Do you mean to tell me, Clytie, that Captain Le Mesurier asked you to marry him, and that you—*refused* him? . . . I—really! I can hardly believe my ears. A man like Captain Le Mesurier—distinguished, brilliant, charming, comes down here on purpose to ask you to be his wife,—a compliment that any girl might be proud of! And you refuse him!—Without thinking it over, without consulting your uncle and me—you throw away this *wonderful* chance! I can only imagine—"

"Oh—don't talk about it any more, Aunt Cecily," cried Clytie passionately—"I can't bear it—"

"But it is my duty to talk about it, Clytie. Do not imagine that I do this for my own pleasure. If I were not so fond of you, I should let you spoil your life in your own way. But I cannot remain silent.—A man like Captain Le Mesurier! To have won his affections in this wonderful way, and then to refuse him. Great Heavens, child—what do you think you are? If you were a very beautiful and attractive girl, you could hardly have hoped to make a more charming marriage in every way. As it is—"

The door of the drawing-room shut abruptly. Lady Cecily was left alone.

Captain Le Mesurier's abrupt departure from the Castle naturally caused much comment in the neighbourhood. Mrs. Maxwell declared Clytie to be a little fool, and pointedly addressed her as

"Mistress Jean" when next she met her, an allusion to that lady in the Scotch song who was "sae daft as refuse the Laird o' Cockpen".

Mrs. Home was in a breath sorry for Clytie, and sorrier for dear Lady Cecily; but was convinced that it would all come right in the end. The other girls regarded Clytie with startled and critical eyes,—for, Le Mesurier being the finest young man who had ever appeared in Lothianshire, it seemed unbelievable that *Clytie MacLeod*, whom they had all rather laughed at because of her unlikeness to themselves, should have refused him; but they were too well-bred to mention the subject to her. For a time Mrs. Mappett enjoyed discoursing upon the sad way in which a certain type of man would go any lengths in making a girl conspicuous, without meaning anything by his attentions after all. Lady Cecily presently got wind of these kind remarks, and promptly drove over to Langlea, where she had a private conversation with Mrs. Mappett, from which that lady emerged distinctly crestfallen. She consoled herself with the reflection that—whatever its cause—the collapse of Clytie's smart love affair, had re-instated Rose in the centre of the local stage. The wedding festivities were at hand, indeed pots of chrysanthemums were already proceeding from the various gardens round about, for the decoration of the church. Upon a rainless but grey January day, Rose walked up the aisle in her white satin dress, followed by two buxom Miss Milbankes, her younger sisters, and Clytie. Lady Cecily watched the ceremony from a front pew, clad in a dove-coloured wedding garment of much elegance, with a conventional smile on her face, but inwardly in a pitiable condition of indignation and regret. Even the odd appearance of the Milbanke family,—Mrs. Milbanke, a stout somewhat pretentious lady in a crimson velvet gown, and Mr. Milbanke senior, a short plain man of business with a Lancashire accent—was but little consolation to her. The poignant and undeniable fact was that Rose was married; while Clytie,—having by her criminal folly thrown away a brilliant opportunity—was not.

To persuade her niece both directly and indirectly of the deplorable mistake which she had committed, was Lady Cecily's one endeavour, and it must be confessed that, after her first impulsive outburst of indignation, she brought to this task a tact and pertinacity which a cleverer woman might have envied. She had been genuinely impressed by Captain Le Mesurier. In every way he was a more desirable husband than she had ever hoped to find for Clytie. If he should return to the charge,—and she could

hardly believe that a man of his character would accept defeat so easily—she was resolved that he should find his beloved in a chastened and regretful mood. There was of course the chance that astonishment and mortification at his rejection might have altered his feelings ; but Lady Cecily resolutely refused to let her mind dwell on so despairing a possibility.

She took an early opportunity of assuring Clytie that nobody wished to interfere with her freedom of choice in so important a matter. Had she asked their advice before taking the irrevocable step, it might have been different ; but as she had preferred to send Captain Le Mesurier away,—and as none of them were likely ever to see him again—it was useless to repine over what might have been. . . . The life of the unmarried woman, thought apt to be sad and monotonous, could doubtless be useful in its way ; and as long as she and Uncle Peter were alive, there would always be a home for Clytie at Brocksden.

In spite of the affectionate reasonableness of such sentiments, Lady Cecily's manner towards Clytie was alternately cold and irritable, and there was in it a suggestion of contemptuous pity, which was inexpressibly galling. While her aunt's claims upon her time seemed to have increased by leaps and bounds, her services were now taken as a matter of course. . . . How far away was that delightful week when no domestic duty of any kind had been expected of her ;—that first day when he lunched at Brocksden, and he and she and Johnnie went a walk afterwards ; that grand and adventurous day of running with the hounds ; those two delightful dinner parties at the Castle, when everybody seemed to think so much more of her than had ever before been the case. Compared to this how stale flat and unprofitable was the present, unlighted by any spark of adventure or emotion. The few remaining Christmas parties only aroused in her a sense of her own forlornness. It was impossible not to realise what a difference it had made to have some one in the room who, even if he did not immediately join her, at least talked to nobody else when she was present ; impossible not to remember those steady blue eyes which had been silently conscious of her wherever she went, and whose gaze seemed to endow her every action with a new spirit and grace.

Johnnie was soon to leave them. He had as usual got his own way, and was to go at least part of the way to Eton upon his motor bicycle. His conversation during the few last days was entirely about his tour ; yet his very absorption in his own affairs and humorous indifference to Clytie's made him a preferable

companion to Aunt Cecily. When he was gone there would be no one to act as a buffer between them.

"My bike's absolutely all right since Matthews overhauled it," Johnnie informed the table generally, coming in late to lunch on the day before his departure. "I took it out for a little run, and that valve's acting *splendidly*! . . . Here Clytie, isn't this yours? I picked it up on the gravel."

He held out a small enamel peacock brooch, in a hand which bore unmistakable traces of having lately cleaned his bicycle.

"It's yours, isn't it? You should have the pin seen to. Rather a neat wee thing. Where did you get it?" he asked, twiddling it to and fro so that the light fell on its tiny gems.

Clytie, who had flushed deeply, held out her hand for it.

"Mr. Buchan sent it me after he went to India."

"It is really a misfortune to be so careless as you are, leaving your ornaments lying about to be lost, or a temptation to the servants. I should have allowed you to keep your string of pearls yourself long ago, if I saw any signs of your growing more careful"—said Lady Cecily.

"Mr. Buchan? Really! Think of that now. And he sent you this present all those years ago, and you've got it still," said Johnnie in a sentimental tone. "He was a very nice man, I must say, although he was a schoolmaster. I always remember him. I daresay he's married a black wife by this time."

"I do not fancy that Mr. Buchan is likely to be in a position to marry," observed Lady Cecily. "I fancy his mother is entirely dependent on him; and he is not in the Civil Service like Robert Home, but only in some subordinate post—something to do with education, I think, is he not, Peter?"

"I can't say my dear. He may be a Lieutenant-Governor by now for all I know. He was clever enough for it anyhow"—said Sir Peter. "Stop a bit though. I did hear something about him, not so long ago. It must have been Home who told me. . . . Yes, I think it was. He had got some good post—head of a native college, or something; so he seems to be doing pretty well for himself."

"I am delighted to hear it. He was an excellent young man and deserved to succeed," said Lady Cecily,—who had never liked Gavin quite so well since the day when he castigated Johnnie.

No more was said on the subject, and the deep flush on Clytie's face gradually faded without anybody having appeared to observe it.

The days of February, with their lengthening and chilly evenings

passed slowly by, not a snowdrop or crocus up yet; and March came in like a lion, with sleet and rain which battered against the window-panes, and an east wind which cut you like a knife if you went out, and howled mournfully in the chimney o' nights. Whatever town-bred folks may think, there is no pleasanter place in weather like this than a Scots country house, with good fires, good books, and canty good-fellowship within. But the atmosphere of Brocksden those days was as cheerless as the elements. Even Nanna shared in the general doof and dowiness. The antique woman was consumed with regrets at the splendid marriage which her bairn had thrown away; and though, when the matter was discussed in the housekeeper's room, she held her head high, and declared that "Miss MacLood o' Standalone had nae need t' jump at the furrst bide she got!" yet, when alone with Clytie, she sometimes could not refrain from lamentations. At other times she hinted of the possibility of "the Captain" returning to try his luck again, in which case—like Juliet's nurse—her advice was all to the effect—"I think you were best marry with the County Paris. Oh he's a lovely gentleman!"

While thus the accumulated pressure of all around her seemed gradually to force her in a given direction, I would give much to know what was going on in Clytie's heart. To guess upon such matters is easy enough: but who, save its creator, can really know the tides and undercurrents, the processes conscious and sub-conscious of body, mind, and spirit, all of which have their part in and influence on the solitary human soul. Looking back upon certain ordeals in our own lives, how hard it is to disentangle the impulses, inhibitions and emotions which struggled together, and in the end produced a given result. Were we throughout puppets in the hands of destiny, or figures in a mathematical problem which could have but one answer? Or was there at one time the possibility of acting otherwise, and so producing a widely different result?

It must be remembered that Clytie was only twenty when she came to this turning of the ways, one road stretching before her in apparently endless monotony, the other,—with the sign-post clearly labelled "The delectable mountains,"—winding away into the adventurous unknown.

The decision which that day in early January had rushed upon her so inevitably that she herself had seemed only a passive agent in the matter, had by March so altered its complexion that sometimes her own heart refused to uphold her, and she ceased to know what she wished. In spite of herself, circumstances forced

her thoughts in the direction of her rejected lover. Nothing in their intercourse had become him so well as his manner of leaving her. When Clytie remembered Mr. Milbanke's passionate reproaches, his assaulting embrace, his tears, his stampings to and fro, her heart ached with admiration for the man who—with much more cause to reproach her—had received her answer in silence, which had continued as they walked towards the house. "You really mean that? Well. Then I had better go away. Good-bye, Clytie." That was all he had said as they parted; but after going a few steps, he had returned, taken her hand and lifted it to his lips. After that he had walked away steadily down the avenue, and not once had he looked back.

His pale distinguished face, his inscrutable eyes, were gradually becoming an obsession with her. She could not think of him without a tingling sensation running through her. The idea of his marrying somebody else, was sometimes a relief, yet at other times it seemed unbearable. . . . She was afraid of him. How could she ever marry a man she was afraid of? Besides, he had gone. She had sent him away. He would never come back, never.

She grew pale and thin. Her sleep was disturbed by strange dreams. The elasticity of life seemed to have left her.

One Sunday afternoon when, according to ancient custom, she and her uncle were going their usual round by the plantation of young trees, Sir Peter remarked upon her altered looks. "You're not looking at all the thing this while back, Clytie. We shall have to get the doctor to give you a tonic."

"I'm quite all right . . . Uncle Peter—couldn't I go away for a bit. I should like to go away from Brocksden, just for a month or so."

"Want to go away, eh? Why, where would you go to?" asked Sir Peter, his attention wandering to a young fir tree which was growing crooked. Grasping its stem with his hand he began loosening the soil round its roots with the spud which adorned the end of his walking stick.

"I would go to—to Italy," exclaimed Clytie, her listless eyes suddenly growing full of eager life. "Oh do let me, Uncle Peter. I must have some money in the bank. Why shouldn't I spend it that way? I'm twenty now, and I've never been abroad in my life. I want to go. I want to see the world. Nanna would go with me. Do say yes."

Sir Peter was down on his knees now, his hands being busy among the roots of the tree. He rose again to his feet,

stamped down the earth vigorously, and drew back to observe the effect.

"It should do all right now. No need to water it at this time of year. Remind me to have a look at it next Sunday."

He picked up his stick and turned his face homewards. It was evident he had not heard a word of what she had said.

"Uncle Peter——"

"Yes my dear."

"About my going to Italy——"

"To Italy"—said Sir Peter staring. Then recollecting—"Ah yes. You were saying you would like to go away for a little. But I hardly think you need go as far as Italy—or Timbuctoo, or anywhere of that sort."

Clytie recapitulated her reasons, with less of joyful appeal in her voice, but more doggedness. "Lots of girls go abroad. I'm grown up. I don't see why I shouldn't"—was her conclusion.

"Yes, yes, but they go under suitable escort. And so may you—(Clytie's heart leaped)—by and by, perhaps. To take such a step without due consideration and preparation would be out of the question. Out of the question. You must see that yourself. You couldn't go alone, and how could we find anyone to go with you all of a sudden like this? You don't even know the language——"

"But Nanna——"

"Ah—she knows Italian, does she?" said Sir Peter jocosely.

"It wouldn't matter, Uncle Peter. I can speak French——"

"Parlee voo frongsay, hey? It's more than I can. So you are prepared to uproot poor old Rutherford from her ain fire-side, and carry her off to a tropical climate. You had better take her tombstone with you."

They walked on in silence over the sodden beech leaves, Sir Peter chuckling to himself and evidently considering the whole idea a mere whim. Constitutionally averse to leaving Brocksden himself, and regarding foreigners, but especially Italians, as a set of cut-throats, and a visit to their countries (he had once been to Paris in the early days of his marriage) merely productive of an intense satisfaction in one's own, it was impossible for him to regard Clytie's desire in any but a humorous light.

"It must be spring in Italy now," murmured Clytie.

"It'll be spring here before very long if you'll have a little patience. I saw a clump of primroses in the wood this morning."

"But—I'm not happy here, Uncle Peter," burst out Clytie

"How can I be happy when Aunt Cecily. . . . You must see how different she's been to me since—since Captain Le Mesurier went away. She's furious with me for not marrying him. Nothing I do pleases her—and yet she won't leave me alone. I'm perfectly wretched. I—I must get away."

Sir Peter's benevolent expression had gradually changed to one of concern and embarrassment. Clytie too felt embarrassed, for, sincere as the affection between them was, they had never yet had anything approaching to an intimate conversation. Blushing, she listened with downcast face to Sir Peter's disjointed but not unsympathetic remarks.

"Well—well I'm sorry to hear that, my dear. It is natural of course that your aunt should be disappointed—especially as the young man was all we could desire.—But I daresay you knew your own mind. . . . At all events no good can come of discussing it now. . . . With regard to your aunt—it is not right of course. You may not have been altogether wise in your decision, but you have done nothing wrong. At the same time you should remember that it all arises from your aunt's affection for you. If you had been our daughter—indeed I may say we regard you as our daughter. . . . You must remember how far from strong Cecily is, and how the least thing upsets her and throws her back. It is very unfortunate. Very. Upon my word I wish the young man had never set foot in Lothianshire. If you were to go off in the way you suggest, it would upset your aunt very much. I'll tell you what, Clytie. I could buy you that mare of Thorogood's. A couple of days' hunting a week——"

"If I can't go to Italy just now, let me go to Standalone," almost wailed Clytie, whose sudden rosy vision of herself in Italy seemed to be collapsing like a pancake which has been inadvertently tossed on the floor.

"Standalone? It's let."

"But the Browns aren't there now, and it's not certain they'll take it on next summer."

"Well—if they don't it might be a good opportunity. But at present the place is theirs. . . . Besides, what could you do at Standalone all by yourself, in this weather, and with no servants?"

"Kirstie would come back to me. I know she would."

They had by this time reached the house, and Sir Peter felt it was time to put an end to a distressing and useless discussion. Speaking somewhat jerkily, for he was removing the mud from his boots upon the iron scraper, he said—

"I should give up any idea of the sort, for the present anyhow, Clytie. Nothing can be arranged in a hurry, and it's wonderful how things might themselves with a little patience. Later on—if you are still of the same mind—why, we'll see what can be done. When the weather improves your aunt will be more herself again; but I'm quite clear that in her present state of health, your duty is with her."

". . . Yes. But if I'd been marrying Captain Le Mesurier she would have been very glad to do without me," said Clytie to herself as she ran upstairs. Passing the housemaid in the passage, she went hastily into her room and shut the door.

6

The post arrived twice a day at Brocksden, at 10 a.m. and in the afternoon at about tea-time. The morning letters were always laid upon the oak table in the hall. One morning Lady Cecily, on advancing to get her letters, perceived an envelope addressed to Clytie in a small clear masculine hand. The writing was unknown to her, but turning it over she perceived, without surprise but with an agitation of joy and hope, that the crest of the 3rd Hussars was on the back. Putting it down again, she went into the morning-room, and calling Clytie, who was sitting in the window seat with a book, she kept her busy for the rest of the morning. Never had her aunt seemed to require more unceasing attention, but not for long had her manner been so affectionate.

When at about a quarter past one Clytie left the room, her head aching from the hours of confinement in the warm and scented atmosphere which Lady Cecily loved, she did not notice the solitary letter lying on the oak table. It was too late to go out before lunch, so she went upstairs and washed, and came down again with the listless step of one who goes to a meal for which he has no appetite. Pretty was standing with the gong-stick in his hand and his eye on the clock, for he would have felt dishonoured had he rung the gong a minute earlier or later than the correct time.

"There is a letter for you, Miss," he remarked in a tone of discreet curiosity, for he too had examined the letter, and observed the crest upon the back.

"For me?" said Clytie, surprised, for her correspondence was limited. She picked it up. The writing was strange to her. Then she too turned the envelope over, and her face grew scarlet, and then quite pale. She opened the front door, and walked out

LOVE IN A MIST

on to the gravel. In the hall the gong rang. It was too late to read it before lunch. She slipped it unopened into her pocket.

An hour later she was walking quickly through the garden on her way to the pleasance beyond. As she approached the woodland solitude, her step grew slower. She looked around to see if she was unobserved. There was not a soul in sight, only the stems of the trees, with their bare branches, on the twigs of which the tiny brown buds were just appearing. Slowly she drew out the letter. For some time she stood with it unopened in her hand, deep in thought. At last she opened it, and, trembling from head to foot, began to read.

"MY DEAR CLYTIE,

"I have not written to you before because I thought it best to give you some time to think things over. When I spoke to you at Christmas time I saw that you were startled, and I think frightened. After all, you knew me very little. Being what you are, you could have hardly answered differently *then*; but although I thought the only thing was to go away for a bit, not for a second did I consider your answer as final.

"I hope never to force myself upon a woman who wants none of me, but in spite of what you said I believe you care for me rather more than you know. I may be wrong of course, but in any case there seems no harm in your allowing me to teach you to know me better than you do now.

"I have decided to come over to Whitelaw Inn next week, April 8th, and have a few days' fishing, possibly more—that depends on you. If you do not wish me to do this you must write and forbid me. Otherwise I shall come.

"This binds you to nothing of course. The rest is on the lap of the gods. The only thing certain is that the regiment goes to India this autumn, and that I go with it.

"Yours ever,

"ROBIN LE MESURIER"

A gentle bréeze fluttered the paper in her hand. A soft rain had begun to fall, wetting the trees, the buds, the grass, her bare head, and making the ink of the letter run a little as if tears had been dropped on it. In the house, Aunt Cecily would have finished her rest, and would be sitting with her embroidery before the drawing-room fire, waiting for Clytie to read aloud to her, as she always did before tea, and after dinner. . . . And to-morrow would be the same, and the next day, and the next, until summer

brought its round of little tennis parties; and after that, winter would come again. . . . Ella Montgomery was thirty-six. She had lived at Fairlees all those years. And so might Clytie live at Brocksden for years and years, summer and winter, always doing the same things.

A sweet shrill note rang through the wood. Suddenly the withered leaves with which the ground was strewn turned russet. The pleasance was flooded with sunshine, and looking round she saw that the grass was a sheet of snowdrops, and that, at the foot of the old beech tree, the primroses were opening their small yellow faces. It was so beautiful, it was as if Primavera had come dancing through the wood. . . . Summer and winter.—What was it she had been trying to remember about summer and winter, just before that thrush sang? . . . She remembered. It was the inscription upon a ring that was dug up somewhere in Greece—"In Summer and in Winter, near and far, here and beyond".

With a moan which swelled to a whistling roar the north wind came careering towards her across the park, and before it rolled and flew and rustled the rout of fallen leaves. A cloud covered the sun. The thrush had stopped singing. Bitter cold drops of rain began to fall. Spring seemed fled and gloomy winter come again, as he always must.

Clytie rung her hands convulsively together, and burst into passionate tears. "Oh Gavin—Gavin"—she cried aloud as if to some unseen listener, "*Why* have you not come back! *I* haven't forgotten. I've waited, and waited—but you never came. . . . It's so long ago,—I can't even see your face when I try to. . . . But I've waited still. And you've not come.—You're not ill. You're not poor. You've forgotten. That's all." . . .

Her passionate wailing voice received no answer except the sound of the wind in the trees. She threw herself down on the damp moss, and wept as if her heart would break. The rain fell, wetting her bent head, and her tweed dress. Her hand crushed Le Mesurier's letter unheedingly against the sodden earth.

The wind sank. The rain poured harder than before, then it too decreased to a drizzle. Although the sun would not set till after six, already the dull grey of evening was closing in. Clytie's violent weeping had gradually ceased. At last she sat up, shivered, and dried her eyes. Through red lids they gazed around her, like those of a lost child seeking for some known face. They fell upon the letter, crumpled, earth stained, so wet that the writing was now illegible.

LOVE IN A MIST

Clytie's face quivered. She picked it up, held it for a moment tightly between her hands, then slipped it into her bosom.

7

The rumour that Captain Le Mesurier was in Lothianshire again, ran through the neighbourhood like the sudden hissing murmur of a rocket soaring up into a placid sky: Molly Maxwell was almost sure she had seen him driving along the Lammerton road: Gunn, the tobacconist, mentioned to Miss Dodd that the gentleman who had been staying at the Castle over Christmas, had come to the Whitelaw Inn for the fishing, for he had sent down for a tin of the best John Cotton this very afternoon: Miss Dodd repeated this information to Mrs. Home, who drove straight to the Castle to tell Lady Ord, who laughed and said—"Miss Dodd is wrong for once. Captain Le Mesurier's at Aldershot with his regiment." Then, before people had any opportunity of meeting together to discuss the matter, came the bang and the shower of falling stars—in other words the engagement of Miss Clytie MacLeod and Captain Le Mesurier was definitely announced.

All was now agog with excitement and congratulation. Two marriages in one year! Such a thing was unknown in Lothianshire. Even Mrs. Mappett abandoned her critical attitude towards Clytie, and, in view of her possibly becoming a future peeress impressed upon the Colonel that they "must certainly give a really handsome present".

It was first rumoured and then definitely known that the marriage was to take place early in July. With this knowledge the neighbours had to be content. The customary round of calls to introduce Captain Le Mesurier all over again in his new capacity, the pleasant teas at Brocksden to hear all about it, must be postponed for the present. Captain Le Mesurier had but a fortnight's leave in all, of which five days had already elapsed, and it would be clearly *mal à propos* to intrude upon the lovers during the brief remaining period. And immediately after his departure, the serious business of the trousseau would take the Brocksden party to London.

The time which passed between Clytie's first meeting with Le Mesurier, and his leaving them to rejoin his regiment, had been so full of new and bewildering emotions that it was not until the last few days that she saw happiness peeping over the shoulder of agitation. His first call, in which they sat *à trois* in the drawing-room, and Aunt Cecily did most of the talking; that next time

when he came to lunch, and his manner was still that of a friendly acquaintance; their third meeting, when, at his suggestion, they went for a walk together, and he told her a good deal about himself, his regiment, and his future prospects, but still seemed to avoid talk of a more intimate nature: the sleepless night which followed, hearing the clock on the stables strike the hours up to four, assuring herself again and again that it was a relief to be almost sure now that he had changed his mind, lighting her candle and trying to read, with the words dancing before her eyes and her red hot brain relentlessly pursuing its own thoughts; his unexpected appearance soon after breakfast next morning, and his request—which in spite of its gentleness seemed of the nature of a command—that she should show him the big wood; all those events seemed to follow one after the other with such rapidity, that she felt as though she were being irresistibly carried along upon a strong current, without any power to ask herself whither she was going, nor whether it was still possible to gain the bank. With a sense of the inevitable, and a blank uncertainty as to what would happen next, she put on her hat and walked beside him, neither of them speaking a word, across the park, under the great willow tree, and on to the wooden bridge. At the other end of it Captain Le Mesurier stopped, and, standing so as to prevent her going farther, looked at her in silence. She endeavoured to return his gaze calmly, but found herself instead staring down at the river, her heart beating so that she felt the bridge was shaking with its reverberations.

“You got my letter—Clytie?”

Still staring into the water, her eyes mechanically following a straw which was being whirled round and round in the current, she bent her head.

“Did you understand what it meant? Have you—thought over—what I asked you?”

A very long pause, so long that the straw managed to wriggle out of its whirlpool, but was a moment later caught in a green trough of water, carried under the bridge, and swept out of sight down the stream.

“Because, I think I’ve a right to get my answer now. . . . Clytie. I’ve been pretty patient. . . .”

“I thought I could give you more time”—said Le Mesurier presently, in an altered voice, harder, more incisive, “but I find I can’t. I—it’s not fair of you to expect it. I came here meaning to go away again if you were still not sure, and to come again later. . . . But I can’t. I’m not going away with

this still unsettled. . . . Clytie . . . if I go this time, if you send me away, I won't come back again."

She half-turned her face towards him, and he saw that her eyes were full of tears.—"Do you mean it's good-bye?" he asked, and his face became suddenly as expressionless as a mask.

"If I had meant that," said Clytie in an uneven whisper, "I—I wouldn't have let you come here, would I?"

For a minute they remained looking at each other. Then Le Mesurier held out both his hands, palms upwards, and Clytie, feeling as if in a dream, laid hers in them. They were grasped so tightly that she almost screamed. Then she was drawn towards him and very gently kissed.

"Is this my little wife?" said Le Mesurier's voice in a whisper.

"—Is this my terrifying husband?" she answered, looking up at him with sudden laughter and a touch of defiance in her eyes.

Immediately she was clipped and kissed in a very different manner—a kiss which left her with face on fire, heaving bosom, and eyes which almost desperately refused to meet his.

After a few minutes' silence, Le Mesurier said in his ordinary voice—"And now we had better go back to the house and tell Lady Cecily".

The week which followed, although strange and dreamlike in its unlikeness to anything that had gone before, was almost entirely happy. Le Mesurier was now staying at Brocksden, and, although Clytie's consciousness of his presence was still extreme (so much so that she sometimes dreamt he was standing by her bedside, and, in the effort to explain to him that this was quite unsuitable and he must go away at once, wakened full of confusion and wondering how a bride *ever* got used to having a man in her room) she could now move and talk naturally in his presence, and with that added life and grace which the knowledge of being loved gives to every human being.

Le Mesurier's manner towards Clytie, now that she was definitely engaged to him, showed a curious combination of tenderness, and decision. On the few occasions when their wills clashed she found herself bound to yield,—or perhaps it would be truer to say that she found, after discussing it with Le Mesurier, that her previous convictions on the matter had undergone a transformation. The date of their marriage was the only question upon which she yielded under protest. Clytie thought the end of September would be soon enough. She even entreated him that it should not be sooner. . . . It was not only that she was fain to postpone as long as might be her plunge into the unknown.

There was more in it than this. Something told her that her old self, her real "me," was already beginning to alter; and that, under the daily, compelling presence of the beloved yet feared man who was to be her mate, it was possible that the Clytie of the past would cease to exist. In Robin's absence her soul rebelled hotly against such a conclusion; but when he was with her, it appeared not only inevitable, but natural. Of all the months of the year, September, that time of ripening fruits, and sunshine, and turning leaves, was the one she loved best. Upon this alone she based her plea. Let her have one more September as Clytie MacLeod, at Brocksden, and when that was over, he might take her wherever he pleased.

Lady Cecily on the other hand—with a disregard for the time required for suitable preparations which was curiously unlike her—was most anxious that the wedding should be early in June. June!—The month of roses, the month in which Lothianshire generally enjoyed fine weather—What could be more ideal? Moreover, this would allow time for Clytie to attend a Drawing Room before departing for India, which, as she had not yet been presented, was most important.

Captain Le Mesurier listened in smiling silence to Clytie's persuasions, and discussed the pros and cons of the matter—with much politeness and apparent willingness to be convinced—with Lady Cecily: but eventually, without either of them quite knowing how it came about, the wedding was fixed upon the date which he had originally suggested, namely the 25th of July.

As a rule, however, his only desire was to please her, and to indulge her every wish. Love is the supreme interpreter, and this masterful, self-possessed man of thirty-two loved her, and already understood her perhaps better than anyone at Brocksden, with the exception of Nanna. There was no need for her to attempt the impossible by explaining to him her feeling for Standalone. It was from him that the proposal came which made her heart leap within her, that they should go there for their honeymoon. She had told him of her vain attempt to escape from Brocksden—and him—and go to Italy; and presently, after a little reflection he said—"I'll take you to Italy, Clytie. August would be too hot, but if the regiment doesn't sail till October, we'll go there in September." Perhaps in no way did he more subtly show his instinctive divination of her feelings than in the restraint of his manners when he was alone with her. To a man of Le Mesurier's haughty and reserved character, it was easy enough to conceal his feelings in public: to be demonstrative before others was impossible

for him. But, in the new and sweet intimacy of their hours together, the self-control on which he prided himself was less easy. In his mind he likened her to a young woodland creature, which, having been tempted with infinite pains out of its leafy shelter, will presently nibble grass at your feet, and even thrust its head into your hand, but which an abrupt caress would startle to flight. That she was scarcely yet awakened from the innocent sleep of childhood, pleased and thrilled him to the bottom of his heart. He knew that their future happiness must largely depend upon this awakening being skilfully managed. When the right hour struck, he intended to do it in his own way. Meantime there was a subtle pleasure in keeping himself well in hand. It clearly differentiated the present from certain previous affairs of which he now thought with disgust, and was resolved to forget.

Only once did he indulge in a repetition of that first embrace upon the wooden bridge, and the result was a brief but sufficiently serious estrangement. It was in the afternoon. Lady Cecily had just left the room to go upstairs and rest, and Clytie and Le Mesurier were standing together before the fire, she talking eagerly, and her lover quite silent. Suddenly she found herself seized, lifted off the ground, the words arrested on her lips in a very definite manner. At that moment he seemed to her a complete stranger, and with an access of terror which was almost repulsion, she struggled to thrust him from her. She was released at once, and the next minute she found herself alone in the room; nor did she see Le Mesurier again that afternoon. He had apparently left the house soon after, and walked over to tea at the Castle; and he returned only in time to dress for dinner. His manner that evening was altered to a proud coldness. He talked to her uncle and aunt, seemed to avoid meeting her eyes, and merely shook hands when she went to bed.

Next morning all was as before: but the episode had made a strong impression upon both of them, which neither forgot.

8

In her intense satisfaction at the engagement Lady Cecily was in better health and spirits than she had been for years. Her manner towards both Clytie and Captain Le Mesurier was everything that an aunt's should be. There was but one point upon which friction might have arisen, namely her reluctance to allow the young couple to be very much alone together.

Although to the eye of an acquaintance Lady Cecily might

have appeared a foolish woman, she was actually possessed of a shrewd vein of worldly wisdom. She held the view that it was essential to maintain a certain restraint and mystery before marriage. Complete intimacy would follow in due course, but, until the irrevocable knot was tied, it was inexpedient. One had heard of cases where familiarity had bred contempt. Whilst therefore avoiding the ungracious position of continually making a third, she was careful never to allow the *tête-à-tête* of her niece and Captain Le Mesurier to be quite secure from interruption; and this undoubtedly gave to it an added piquancy, a tantalising yet precious element. Upon one point she was inflexible. That hour most dear to lovers, when, the elders of the house having retired to bed, they sit by the fire together, was forbidden them. From dinner onwards they must content themselves with such conversation as Sir Peter's absorption in his book, and Lady Cecily's over her embroidery, permitted. When ten-thirty struck, there was a general move, and Lady Cecily would go upstairs taking Clytie with her.

Not for a day would Robin Le Mesurier have submitted to such restrictions, had not his reason sided against his desires in the matter. He realised that Lady Cecily had been a powerful ally in his wooing, and as he also liked her he was prepared to study her wishes so long as they did not too seriously interfere with his own. It was not until the last evening of his visit therefore, that he took the opportunity, during the slight bustle of putting away embroidery and lighting candles before retiring for the night, to say in a low imperative tone to Clytie,

"Go up now, but don't undress. Come down again in twenty minutes . . . to the library."

Clytie gave him a glance in which excitement and misgiving were mingled.

"I must have you to myself this evening"—he said.

When she entered the library, Le Mesurier, who had exchanged his tail coat for a rather dashing smoking jacket, was standing meditatively before the fire. He smiled when he saw her, and drew up a big leather arm-chair for her; then, leaning his shoulders against the mantelpiece, he stood looking down at her.

"Cigarette, Clytie?"

He was deliberately teaching her to smoke, or rather encouraging her to do so, for she had learnt the lesson years before from one who was gone. A woman—Le Mesurier said—ought to be able to enjoy an after-dinner cigarette with her husband; moreover, half the nicest women he knew smoked. It was only the

bourgeoisie who thought it improper. After this Lady Cecily scarcely liked to object to it as "unsuitable" or fast; but she expressed a fear that Clytie might become an inveterate smoker, with stained finger tips, and damaged lungs.

"I won't let her do that," said Le Mesurier coolly.

So Clytie now received a cork-tipped Bond Street cigarette, and was rather glad to have it to occupy her, for the secret and midnight atmosphere of this rendezvous made her feel excited and embarrassed. As though he realised this, Le Mesurier began talking in his ordinary tone of their meeting in London. He would come up fairly often, he said; certainly for every week end, and probably for ten days' leave as well. He wanted especially to introduce her to his friends in the regiment, before they were married. She would meet some of them at Hurlingham—he would take her there—but for his particular pals he would arrange a special meeting.

"I shall be awfully shy——"

"Why should you? . . . Besides, you look rather sweet when you're shy."

"That kind of very grand young man (like Captain Montgomery) never seems to see that I'm in the room . . . except *you*."

"Well—I shall be there all right," he said taking her hand.

"If you'll protect me I won't mind." (The pressure of his hand answered 'I'll always protect you'.) "But Robin"—went on Clytie, in a half-remonstrant, half-eager tone, "There are lots and lots of things besides parties that I want to do in London. I've never been there, you know, and I've always longed to go. I want to see the Tower of London, and Kew when the bluebells are out, Oh—and Madame Tussauds! I want to go to the theatre simply awfully—I've never seen a play. I'd like to go there every evening. I want to see London properly, to go to queer bohemian places in Soho—isn't it Soho?—And I want to go to Greenwich and eat whitebait."

"What a lot of wants . . . and I've only one."

Clytie glanced quickly at him, and then away into the fire. It had burnt low. She knelt down and began putting on some fresh pieces of wood. Having done this she remained there, idly thrusting a twig into the flame, and drawing it out again.

Suddenly Le Mesurier, bending down, laid his finger on her neck.

"—I think that was the spot—wasn't it?" he said.

She stared up at him in bewilderment, which presently turned to a burning blush. Was it possible he meant—*that*? How could he know? Could Captain Montgomery have told him?

"What do you mean, Robin?"

"You know what I mean"—he said, looking at her with a somewhat Mephistophelian expression.

There was a pause. Then—"How did you know?" asked Clytie in a whisper.

"How do I know? . . . Because it was me."

"You?"

There was another silence, which was at last broken by Clytie springing to her feet so that her face was as nearly on a level with his as their very different statures permitted.

"I don't believe it. Whoever it was, it wasn't you."

"Thank you, Clytie," said Le Mesurier taking her hand. "That's the nicest thing you've ever said to me. . . . But the worst of it is I must tell you something. And I'm afraid it may make you angry."

"Perhaps—But not with you," said Clytie.

"Yes with me,—unless you understand. But I'm afraid you won't understand."

"Try me and see——"

Le Mesurier hesitated. Never before had she so unmistakably shown that she was learning to love him. It seemed a pity to spoil even a few minutes of this hour. But he had begun to tell her, and when he began a thing he liked to see it through.

"All right. I will. I kissed you in the dark in the billiard-room at Fairlees, because I thought you were Lily Mackie."

"How ridiculous you are"—exclaimed Clytie with a burst of laughter. Then it abruptly died upon her lips. Her face grew stiff with anger. She drew away her hand.

"Yes. I was afraid you'd take it like that," said Le Mesurier, who had been watching her with an air of cool imperturbability which did not perhaps altogether reflect his secret feelings.

Clytie could not trust herself to speak. She turned away and began idly fingering some fossils which lay on the mantelpiece. A hand gently but firmly took hold of her arm and she found herself turned towards the figure, which a minute ago she had gazed on with pride and affection, and which she now felt she could hardly bear to look at.

"Listen to me. It was all quite simple and pointless. I never cared tuppence for Miss Lily, and you know that as well as I do. But that didn't prevent my seeing that she was a damned pretty girl. I'd been hiding with her behind the sofa before that, and I felt that she expected me to do it then. But I wasn't inclined to.

Then afterwards it struck me that I'd been an ass—that Fairlees wasn't such an amusing spot that one should refuse a pleasant thing like a kiss when it was practically offered one. So I waited until I heard her coming towards me.—And I took my kiss. . . . and it was *you* ! ”

There was a pause.

“Are all men like that ? ” asked Clytie tonelessly.

“All that I know are—that is if they're really men. There isn't a fellow in the regiment who wouldn't have done it the minute he realised she wanted it. After all, a kiss isn't a deadly sin. . . . I mean as long as one's——. *Now* it would be treason of course.”

“Have you——”

“Have I kissed other women ? Yes. I have . . . but not many. And it never meant”—he snapped his fingers—“*that* to me. That's all past and done with. And I'm not going to tell you about it.”

Hardly knowing what she was doing, Clytie walked across the room to the window, and laying her forehead against the cold glass looked out on to the moonlit terrace, and never noticed that the daffodils were beginning to open in the Spring border. Her mind was in such a tumult of confused anger, pain and jealousy, that for the moment the foundation upon which her future was to be built seemed to have split under her feet. When she could command her voice so as to speak calmly, she said, “I think I should like to go to bed”.

There was no answer. With a faint “good night” she walked towards the door. Despair was in her heart at this moment. Everything seemed spoilt, and he was going away to-morrow morning. As she laid her hand upon the handle of the door, her heart leapt, for a voice said—

“Clytie.”

“Yes.”

“Come here. I want you.”

She remained where she was, her eyes fixed on the ground. She might have answered—“Yes, but I don't want you”. She might simply have left the room and gone upstairs to bed. Either, she told herself, would have been an adequate expression of her feelings. Instead, she found herself slowly returning across the floor to where Le Mesurier sat. She stood before him. He put out his hands and drew her gently on to his knees. His arms closed round her. She hid her face against his shoulder, and lo ! all was well.

“Tu me pardonnes ? ” said a low voice very close to her ear.

"Yes. . . . But I can't bear you to have done things like that," she answered with a little sob.

"I feel like that too. But you see, I didn't know that you were in the world then."

The wood shifted on the fire. The clock in the hall struck twelve. Clytie started and attempted to rise, but for a moment she was prevented.

"After all, Clytie, if it hadn't happened, I should never have known what a particularly nice neck you have," said Le Mesurier.

9

The Wysees had taken a house in South Street for two months. Thither early in May went Lady Cecily and Clytie, to set about the all-important business of the trousseau. Sir Peter was to follow in a week or so when the first paroxysm of shopping had abated.

To Lady Cecily's astonishment, and not altogether to her satisfaction, the future bridegroom took a prominent part in the choosing of the trousseau. That he should occasionally escort them on a shopping expedition she could have understood: it would have been a gratifying sign of his devotion to her niece. But once inside the sacred portals of Madame Elise of Hanover Square, or Mademoiselle Claire of Bond Street, he should have become a bored and mute figure in the background, occasionally strolling to the window to look out, or interrupting some important discussion to inquire whether they were not finished yet. Compassion would presently dismiss him to his cavalry club, where they could join him later for tea. But that he should hold a definite point of view with regard to Clytie's frocks, and should resolutely take a part in the selection of patterns and styles, seemed to her "hardly suitable!"

"No use wasting time looking at this white satin. White doesn't suit her. Bring us some soft creamy stuff, will you—please. And some gold brocade or something, for the train."

"Mais quelle idée! My dear Robert! *Colours* for the wedding dress! Of course it must be white. It is *always* white for a bride."

"Perhaps miladi, Monsieur means not an ivory white. We have some very beautiful new materials from Paris which have quite a creamy tone. Mamzelle—bring those patterns of *crêpe de chine* to show Captain Le Mesurier."

If on some points he had to yield, in others he insisted on having his own way. For the pale pink satin dress, he substituted a coffee-coloured tulle with a cluster of orange roses at the waist. The white cloth coat and skirt was ruled out of the list altogether, and instead of the fashionable and elaborate going-away dress, he chose a very simple frock of leaf green silk.

"It *is* sweet of you, Robin Adair, to take all this trouble over my frocks. But I'm afraid it's no use. I shall always be the ugly duckling who never turned into a swan after all."

"I wonder when you'll get rid of this absurd idea that you are plain," said Le Mesurier frowning. "Do you think I should be marrying you if you were?"

"Rather—because of the beauty of my soul."

"Gamin! . . . But look here, Clytie, I'm not joking. Clothes count. They're worth taking trouble over. I'd as soon think of letting them bring round my thoroughbred mare without grooming her, as let you wear any sort of frock the dressmaker likes to foist on you."

"I'm not complaining. I'm overwhelmed with gratitude."

"All right then. Show it by not jibbing at fittings. You *must* spend a good deal of time over this business. It's no good hurrying through it or shirking it. Yes, I know it bores you"—raising his voice to drown her protest—"but it'll save you trouble later on. You won't be able to get clothes in India——"

"I *am* glad to hear that."

"You are very perverse. I never met a woman who needed to dress more carefully, or who repaid it better. Look at that hat I chose you yesterday." He fixed his eyes sternly upon her brown chip hat trimmed with horse-chestnut blossom. "Don't you admit you look rather sweet in it?"

Clytie blushed with pleasure.

"Oh Robin—What can make you want to marry me?" burst from her lips after a moment's silence.

"What a queer question. I wonder what you want me to say."

"Well but really, I don't know why you do. You could marry anybody you like . . . and you choose *me*! I think and think sometimes, but I can't see why you do it."

"You're an absurd child——"

"That doesn't seem a very good reason——"

He frowned, smiled, and jerked out—

"Mais, puis que je t'aime, parbleu,—que faire?"

"Tu m'aimes?"

"Evidemment."

They had walked on for the distance of four houses, before Clytie said very humbly—

"But why, Robin?"

He shrugged his shoulders, looked at her, stared up at the sky as if for inspiration, and at last answered—

"Upon my word, Clytie, I can't exactly tell you. It's one of the things that are so obvious, one can't put it into words. If you ask me when it began—well I don't know that either. Nothing in the world I wanted less than a wife when I paid that fatal visit to Fairlees. I'm not joking. That's the absolute truth. It wasn't till it was over, and you were gone, that I began to have a notion something pretty serious had happened to me. I waited a solid month, always hoping I'd get over it. But I found I couldn't. . . . And that's really all there is to tell you about it."

This time they had walked to the end of the street, and crossed into Grosvenor Square, before either of them spoke again.

"Topping window-boxes over there. I like window-boxes. What shall we have in ours when we've a house in town?" said Robin.

Receiving no answer, he bent down to look under the brim of the new hat, and saw that her eyes were full of tears.

"Why Clytie—My little girl, what's the matter?"

"N—nothing. Don't look at me. I'm just silly. . . . Only—I will try to be good to you—*always*—Robin Adair."

At moments like this there seemed nobody else in the amazing world except Robin and herself. The miracle of his love, revealed to her all the more through the pains he took to veil it in ordinary language, bewildered and intoxicated her. For a little she would feel so safe, so cherished, that it made her think of the Peace of God which passes all understanding; and then—a glance of his eye, a note in his laughter, would fill her with the most disturbing sensations of restlessness, dread, and delight.

But there were other days when this intimacy of soul seemed to vanish, and a blank wall to rise between them hiding each from the sight of the other: days when Robin, being in a certain mood himself, seemed to be completely indifferent to or unconscious of its effect upon Clytie; days when he talked of the regiment without ceasing—or so it seemed to her—and Clytie's part in the conversation was one of, presumably, sympathetic silence. But the worst

of it was that she did not feel sympathetic when he talked like this, but simply antagonistic. That her lover's interest should be centred upon this unknown thing, the regiment, that he should feel for it a passionate loyalty far beyond what he expressed in words (only once did he admit to her that the great desire of his life was to become Colonel and lead it into action), roused in her a poignant jealousy. It seemed hard—unfair too—that having offered her the first place in his heart, an honour beyond anything she had ever dreamt of, he should now expect her to acquiesce in playing second fiddle wherever the regiment was concerned. That such feelings were unworthy, she was perfectly aware, but with a touch of defiance she told herself that she could not prevent herself from having them. There was something so—irritating really—in Robin's calm assumption that she must feel as he did in this matter. It seemed the regiment was always to come first. It was to be her privilege to belong to it, though only in her wifely capacity; and her duty to do nothing which could even indirectly detract from its honour, or make it appear ridiculous. Such sentiments gave her the uneasy feeling of the wild animal which suspects that the pleasant place whither it has strayed, grazing, may prove to be a trap. To be with him, she was willing to give up her love of solitude; to please him, she would struggle to overcome her shyness; but how could he expect her to rejoice at the idea of becoming a member of an intimate circle of men and women who, though quite strangers to her, would apparently have the right to know and to criticise.

When Robin talked to her of himself, she listened with the rapt attention of one who turns a new page of a fascinating novel. But when he was in what she called "his regimental mood," it must be admitted that her thoughts occasionally wandered. Behold them then, walking up Bond Street on their way home to tea, (after an hour spent in the Burlington Arcade buying him socks and ties) Le Mesurier monologuing upon the regimental chances in the coming polo tournament, and Clytie trying to explain to herself the inner meaning of his queer but original—yes, certainly original—attitude towards dress. What made it so puzzling was that it did not seem to belong to the rest of his character. He wasn't a bit like a reincarnation of the old beaux, Brummel or that other fellow who was the last of the dandies; because they were petty in spite of their wit and charm, and there was nothing petty about Robin. What was it then? Was it simply his way of expressing his sense of beauty—for he did love beauty although he never talked about it. Those socks that he gave seven shillings and sixpence for—

they really were a beautiful colour, although they were only socks. Or was it that, as people had to wear clothes, Robin, who loathed the second best in everything, chose to make a fine art out of a tiresome necessity? No man in the world dressed as well as he did. That was certain. . . .

"I might get a staff billet, if we got fed up with India, or the regiment was sent to South Africa or somewhere. But of course we'd join it again when it came home."

"Of course. . . ." His passion for the regiment too. That was all a bit of the same thing really. Whatever he did, he did with all his might. Look at the way he played bridge. Probably he would be a great general some day. Her pride glowed at the idea; then, seeing a picture of herself as the general's wife, very small and shy, opening bazaars, she felt faint with horror.

"—People you meet talk of soldiering as a soft job—a sort of game to keep the sons of the idle rich out of mischief." Le Mesurier gave a short ironic laugh. "—A tight corner the silly fools would find themselves in some day, without those idle sons to protect their factories and their parliaments, and give a lead to the other fellows."

"You don't think there'll be another war"—cried Clytie, suddenly listening to him with all her might.

"I don't think. I know. Of course there will. . . . What was I saying though? Oh yes—all that sort of talk's absolutely off the lines. And it does harm. Soldiering isn't just a game. It's a national necessity."

"So's tea," said Clytie flippantly, ringing the bell of number 55.

10

They found Sir Peter and Lady Cecily in the drawing-room. There were *pâté* sandwiches and a Buzzard cake, but in spite of those delicacies the meal was not altogether a pleasant one. Le Mesurier had some time ago arranged to escort Clytie and her aunt to Ascot, where his brother officers would turn up in force, so that it would be an excellent opportunity for introducing them to his future wife. Lady Cecily had pronounced it a charming scheme. And now, at the eleventh hour, Sir Peter suddenly declared that it would be too tiring for Lady Cecily, already somewhat exhausted by shopping; and that, much as he would have liked to take her place, an important engagement made it impossible. Le Mesurier received this announcement with polite regret; but his calm, and to a certain extent his manners also,

vanished when he discovered that Lady Cecily was resolved not to allow Clytie to go without her. He pleaded, reasoned, offered to find any number of chaperons, pointed out the importance of the event from the regimental point of view, but all in vain. To his most earnest expostulation Lady Cecily only replied with gentle inflexibility—"Most kind of you, Robert, but indeed I think it is better not". The idea of Clytie making her first appearance in high society, in the charge of an unknown chaperon, with a string of young officers in attendance, appeared to her quite impossible. With a graceful assumption that the discussion was closed, she spoke of something else; but Le Mesurier, with a slight smile on his lips which was contradicted by the steely glint in his eyes, returned to the charge again. It became necessary to administer a mild snub.

"I think, Robert, this is one of those matters which must be left to me to decide," she murmured, and with an air of finality rose to her feet.

Le Mesurier's answer was to take the precious tickets for the enclosure out of his pocket, and very deliberately tear them in two, and throw them into the fire.

Lady Cecily raised her eyebrows slightly, calmly collected her purse and parasol from the sofa, and with a placid, "I think the brougham is waiting, Peter. Shall we go?" swept from the room.

The foregoing scene had made Clytie profoundly uncomfortable. That Robin should be unable to control his temper before her uncle and aunt, both vexed and frightened her. She had never seen him in this mood before, and she marvelled at Lady Cecily's temerity in opposing it. Seated before the fire, she cast a timid glance at her lover's expressionless countenance. For at least three minutes he remained stonily silent, his eyes blank, and his lips tightly closed. At last, hardly opening them enough, it seemed, for the sound to issue forth, he ejaculated,

"—Rotten."

"Awfully," said Clytie throwing an eager conviction into her voice which verged on hypocrisy, for the idea of going to Ascot had always filled her with secret alarm.

"—But you must go without me, Robin. Really you must. I couldn't bear——"

"Please don't talk nonsense. Possibly you may enjoy amusing yourself without me. I confess I don't."

Clytie flushed hotly, and opened her lips to make an angry reply. "—It's very unfair," she began . . . then, with a sudden

change of mood, checked herself, came across the room, and sat down on the arm of his chair.

"Oh Robin Adair," she said softly, and touched his cheek with her finger.

"Don't you see"—he caught her hand not altogether gently—"how it spoils everything? You'd have met all the other fellows there. It's the very thing I've been waiting for. And now, to have it all hashed at the last minute. If they'd even objected to it sooner—but not a word till I'd got the tickets and everything fixed up. I'm really not accustomed to being treated in this way. . . . Lovett was going to give us lunch too. . . . You've obviously no idea how much trouble I've taken about the whole thing."

"I *know* you have——"

"Well then I think the least you could do was to back me up, instead of sitting there saying nothing, as if you didn't care a damn whether we went or not. . . ."

In a dejected attitude she listened, until the first flood of his wrath seemed to have expended itself.

"Take me to Kew instead. We can look at the bluebells without a chaperon," she murmured. "They're really much nicer than races, though you don't think so."

"There's a time for bluebells and a time for Ascot," he retorted, unwilling to be mollified.

"A time to kiss and a time to refrain from kissing" . . . said Clytie, and ventured to drop a rather hurried kiss upon his frowning forehead. For a moment he remained obstinately unresponsive, then suddenly put his arms round her.

"Well—perhaps I will take you to Kew, if you'll be really nice to me."

"I will—oh I will, if you won't be cro—vexed about it any more," she whispered, clinging to him, and yielding to his kisses.

At that moment Clytie might have learnt the secret which nature keeps for lovers,—that the tongue separates, but the body bridges the gulf. Robin's mood seemed to have vanished as if it had never been. This might have been one of their happiest hours, could she but have left well alone, and allowed her warm young bosom, her soft cheeks, her dark eyes, to speak for her. But she must needs fill the first pause in his caresses, by saying—

"But you know, Robin——"

"What do I know, darling?"

"It won't all be plain sailing—I mean, there may be pretty stormy weather when we're married, if you——"

"Will there? I don't think so. 'A lake and a fairy boat To

sail in the moonlight clear, And merrily shall we float, From the dragons that guard us here.'"

"You mustn't call Aunt Cecily a dragon! . . . What if I want the boat to go one way, and you want it to go another?"

"Toss for it, I suppose."

"Well but—you always seem to—to think you must have your own way. . . . Yes you *do*, Robin. . . . And—and I do like to have mine sometimes."

Le Mesurier's face stiffened. The pressure of his arm round her waist relaxed. With some warmth he challenged her to mention a single instance on which he had overridden her reasonable desires. As often happens in such cases, Clytie was unable to think of anything, except the matter of the date of their marriage (which she found it impossible to mention) so had to confine herself to vague generalities. Finally she found herself reduced to saying she was sorry, but even as she did so the consciousness that her charge had been a just one, and that she was being hardly dealt with, made her cheeks flush and her lips quiver. At the sight of her face, Le Mesurier's mood abruptly changed. With gestures of such exaggerated humility that in spite of her indignation Clytie could not help smiling, he sank on his knees, and invited her to put her 'little foot on his grizzled head' if it would give her the least pleasure.

"Thank you, Robin Adair, I don't want to do that—not to-day anyhow. . . . But I really will want to do smaller things presently—like staying at home from some horribly grand ball, or going for country walks by myself when you say it's not suitable."

He frowned a little, got on to his feet, dusted his knees, and then kissed her hand. "You shall do whatever you like, Clytie—in reason."

"I know what that means. Oh Robin—I *must* be free. I can't be happy when I'm not free."

"Silly child. Who wants to prevent you. Only—you'll admit I'm rather older than you are, and have seen a bit more of the world, so you mustn't throw up your head and bolt if I show you the ropes."

After a pause during which he walked to the window, he added . . . "I say, it's a perfect evening. Put on your hat will you, and we'll go for a stroll in the Park."

"I tell you what, Clytie"—said Le Mesurier as they sat under a large elm tree in Kensington Gardens, "I want you to get to know Tony Jones, anyhow, before you leave Town. He's my best

pal in the regiment. He's coming to Brocksden for the wedding of course. But I want you to know him before that."

"Do bring him to South Street."

"No more use than a sick headache. Your aunt would be there all the time. I want it to be just us three. Let me see. . . . Tony's coming up to Town to-morrow after Ascot. Aren't Sir Peter and Lady Cecily dining out on Friday?"

"Yes, but I'm afraid Aunt Cecily——"

"We're not going to ask her. Just you leave it to me, Clytie. I'll fix it all up. . . . Yes. That'll be all right. You be ready on Friday to come out to dinner somewhere whenever the coast's clear. We'll call for you in a hansom. And look here, bring a latch-key."

Clytie's cheeks glowed.

"Will you come?"

"Won't I!" she exclaimed, seizing his hand and squeezing it with all her might. "What fun. What *awful* fun. *At last* I shall sow some wild oats."

They sat in silence for a few minutes, as happy as children who have planned to play truant together.

"I say, Clytie—that coffee-coloured lace sort of frock you tried on yesterday—you must wear it. I never saw you look so topping in anything."

"I'd love to. But it's not ready yet. Perhaps it will be, though. . . . Oh but Robin, I can't. It's not to be sent to South Street. All my new things are to go straight to Brocksden."

"You leave that to me. Keep your eyes open to-morrow for a parcel from Elise—I'll square the dressmaker."

"But Robin, Aunt Cecily would be certain to see it. I couldn't possibly tell the servants to smuggle it upstairs."

"Couldn't you. Well, perhaps not. All the same——"

Clytie listened in silent obstinacy to his persuasions. Her mind was made up on that subject. Cheerfully as she would disobey her aunt, she *would not* make a fool of her before the servants. And yet, she did hate to disappoint him.

"Well then, it simply comes to this,—We must drive round to my rooms, and you can change there," said Le Mesurier.

"*What* a good plan. You're simply wonderful. You think of everything."

"You think it would be all right then?" Her ready assent made him for the moment doubtful.

"Simply splendid. I do feel so stupid and shy you know, Robin, when I meet people I don't know. I don't seem able to

help it. But I don't believe I'll be a bit shy with you there, and that frock on. . . . I say—that's the man who makes you pay for your chairs. I've no pennies. Let's fly."

"Very remiss of you. I always expect a woman to pay for me when I go out with her."

They began strolling homewards across the Park. It was a delicious day. The border along by the Bayswater road was brave with daffodils and tulips. It was as if a bit of the country had strayed into the great city, and not been able to find its way out again. Tiny fleecy clouds drifted across the blue sky. A band was playing in the distance. Clytie walked with a lilting step, hardly feeling the grass under her feet. To be happy, and beloved, to walk in the sunshine,—how wonderful it was.

A little to abate the joyful tingling of her blood, (lest, as Nanna used to tell her as a child when she was too excited—"It'll end in a cry,") she began warning him not to expect Captain Jones to be particularly impressed with his choice of a wife. "He's a gentleman of course, so I expect he'll pretend not to notice that I'm only five foot high and have red hair. Anyhow, he'll have to talk to me."

"Now I should like to know, supposing you really were plain, not just an absurd idea you've got into that same red head of yours—whether you'd joke about it as merrily then. That's what I'd like to know"—said Le Mesurier looking sideways at her.

"Just the same, because I *am*, Robin." Yet, in spite of herself, at this moment she felt a delightful suspicion that perhaps she was not.

"Well, it's a good thing you've got a sense of humour, for I've none whatever."

"But I don't laugh at myself about things I really mind, either. I try to sometimes, because—somebody, long ago, once told me I ought to."

Her voice sounded to her queer and forced, but she had said it. The long waited for opportunity of telling Robin something of the old days, . . . and of Gavin . . . had come at last. Breathing rather quickly, and looking straight before her, she waited for him to answer, to question her. She would tell him everything—or almost everything. She felt sure he would understand . . . at least she told herself she felt sure.

"You mustn't judge the regiment by Arthur Montgomery, Clytie. He's rather an ass," said Le Mesurier.

"Is he?" said Clytie, hardly knowing what she was answering. A pang of disillusionment contended with a feeling of unaccount-

able relief in her bosom. Could any two people really know each other . . . or if they could, perhaps it was better they shouldn't—before marriage. Once one was married it was all different of course. . . .

"Obviously, if he doesn't see you're in the room, because Lily Mackie is. And by the bye young woman, Miss Lily, in her artless, girlish way, confided to me an uncommonly delicate episode in your past career. If I ever have to take a forcible line with you, it won't be the first time, I fancy."

"I don't know what you mean—and I don't want to," said Clytie with red cheeks.

"Ah well, I daresay I shall manage to break you in without actually——"

"Say another word and I'll spring on to that 'bus——"

"You can't. You haven't a penny."

On they went, he teasing her, she half-laughing, half-indignant, both of them well content with the day and each other; until they came to Marble Arch and the shifting crowds which tarry there to listen to that hardy annual the Hyde Park orator. Clytie paused, fascinated by the rhetoric of a middle-aged female who was talking of woman's suffrage; but Le Mesurier, taking her by the elbow, hurried her away, as if from some contagion, and along the border of the park where the large round flower-beds are.

"All the same she's quite right. Why shouldn't we have votes? It's awfully unjust"—said Clytie.

"Now I give you fair warning, Clytie—if you join the shrieking sisterhood I'll divorce you!"

They paused before a bed of pink tulips knee-deep in forget-me-nots. Le Mesurier regarded them meditatively. "I wonder if they'd grow in India. I tell you what, Clytie—we'll take out some bulbs and try them in our garden. Depends where we are of course."

"Where do you think we'll go?"

"Secunderabad perhaps. No good trying English flowers there. But I fancy they're sending us to the Punjab, and if so——"

"The Punjab. . . . The Punjab" . . . repeated Clytie, and her face suddenly became suffused with colour.

"Not a bad place by any means. You get a decent cold weather there, and in the hot weather you'd go to the hills of course. But I could generally get leave and take you to Kashmir. You can still get decent shikar there, if you go up into the hills. Of course if you want a tiger—and I must say I want to shoot a tiger before we leave India—you have to go" . . .

He waxed enthusiastic on the theme, planning a regular Idyll of Eastern shikar. Presently he glanced at her, expecting to see an answering enthusiasm on her face; and lo! it was a closed book to him, silent, pale, with averted troubled eyes.

"What's the matter, Clytie? Do you not like the idea of going shooting with me?"

"Yes, Robin—of course I do"—she cried starting, and blushing more deeply than before. "Please go on telling me."

But his flow of talk seemed to have come to an end. In silence they moved on to the next bed of flowers, white lilies which filled the air with their fragrance. There was nobody near except a gardener, and his back was turned to them. Suddenly Le Mesurier captured Clytie's hand in his own, which tightened on it and relaxed, tightened and relaxed, in a pulsating rhythm. He looked down into her face, smiling a little, and with a curious expression in his eyes.

"You're thinking it will be a bit queer to be all alone in India with me—aren't you? But perhaps, when the time comes—you won't find it altogether unpleasant"—he whispered.

CHAPTER VII

GAVIN COMES BACK

My hairt is sair, I daurna tell
For the sake o'—somebody.

—Old Scots Song

I

SUPPER was going on in the large room at the Eldorado. Innumerable German waiters hurried to and fro bearing lobster mayonnaise and pêches Melba. Above the buzz of conversation sounded the jovial popping of the champagne corks. Except for a few large parties, the company consisted mainly of couples, and most of those were too occupied with each other to give more than a casual glance at the young lady in the coffee-coloured tulle dress, who evidently felt it rather an ordeal to walk first across that gorgeous room blazing with lights, and the two immaculately clad and perfectly self-possessed young men who followed her.

This final adventure of supper after the theatre, instead of hurrying back to South Street as quickly as might be in order to be there before Aunt Cecily and Uncle Peter could have returned from their dinner party, was a clear tempting of Providence. The strange thing was that, not only to Le Mesurier but to Clytie also, it now seemed completely unimportant whether Aunt Cecily discovered everything and was furious, or not.

The champagne was singing in Clytie's head—not merely the ordinary stuff which comes out of a gold-topped bottle (of that she had only drunk one glass)—but that infinitely more intoxicating wine, of life and sex and laughter, of pleasure with her dancing feet and rosy petticoat, and Dionysus with vine leaves round his hair. It had been the most thrilling and exciting evening of Clytie's life. When she was home again and alone, she would remember it in detail; but now—why it was still going on, and her head was a kaleidoscope of whirling brilliantly coloured pictures. . . . The sound of a hansom stopping at the door from

which Aunt Cecily's sober brougham had, but ten minutes earlier, departed, and herself stealing out, with a feeling of adventure and glowing impropriety, to join the two figures with white waistcoats and cigarettes who awaited her on the pavement. . . . Robin's own rooms, with the old sporting prints on the walls, and the deep leather arm-chairs; his dressing-table with its funny brushes without handles, and razors, and hair washes, and underneath it, rows of boots and shoes; her tulle dress, with slippers and stockings to match (she had forgotten all about them, but *he* had remembered) laid out on the small narrow bed which gave a touch of austerity to the luxurious room; her hurried undressing and re-dressing, with hands which trembled with impatience and excitement, just as they did upon a blazing day when she was longing for her plunge into the river; the queer look in Robin's eyes when, rather self-conscious and shy, she came back to them; and the bunch of scented yellow roses which he gave her. . . . Dinner at the Carlton with tawny tulips on their table—"the dead spit of Miss MacLeod's hair" as Captain Jones pithily expressed it. . . . The thrilling sensation of walking up the red carpeted steps of the theatre, and the play itself, so wonderfully interesting and life-like that she would gladly have talked of it for the rest of the evening, had not Robin unconsciously silenced her by pronouncing it—"a pretty dull show!" . . . And then, when she believed that nothing more could happen, except going home to bed, this crowning adventure of having supper in the middle of the night!

Remembering all those things she gave a sigh of contentment, and leaning back in her chair gazed with smiling unenvious eyes at the people round them. . . . Those other girls, none of whom, poor things, had coffee-coloured tulle dresses, nor roses, nor Robin Adairs, but simply white frocks and their mothers chaperoning them—they belonged to the old world, Aunt Cecily's world, where you drove in landaus, and lived in a big family house, and never did anything which was not perfectly suitable. . . . She could not scorn that old world altogether, because, though it had often bored and irritated her, it was kind and good; still, it was nothing more than lemonade, and Robin—was champagne. . . . Nor, even at this moment, could she quite forget that other world, her very own, that place of woods and song-birds, and a horizon bounded by moorland, of childish dreams, of old clothes and solitary rambles, and reading of books before the fire. It might be that was the real world after all—only, compared to this new intoxicating world of Robin's, it seemed to fade away into the

unseen. For who would trudge alone through wet woods, when they might be clad in silk attire with Robin by their side? Who so foolish as to spend their youth reading of life in books, when real life, glowing, enchanting, mysterious life, was waiting to sweep them away. . . . Her emotions were like those which some gentle young Trojan maiden, busy over her household tasks, may have felt, catching a sudden glimpse of Helen in her radiant beauty passing by. . . . Or like some solitary pixie stealing from the recesses of her forest, to find a group of Watteau maidens and cavaliers, all picnicking and love-making in a flowery glade.

"Not tired, Clytie?" asked Le Mesurier, and his eyes met hers.

"Tired!" she echoed with joyful mockery—as though it were possible to be tired on such an evening as this! With eager responsiveness she turned to Captain Jones, who wanted to tell her a funny story.

Le Mesurier lit a cigarette, and leant back in his chair at such an angle that he could look at her without appearing to do so. He loved her little pointed chin, and the thick dark line of her eyebrows; loved too the thinness of her girlish shoulders which were exposed by the *décolleté* lines of her new frock. Never, he told himself, had he seen her look quite so delicious as to-night. And the queer thing was, even if the frock had not suited her, even if she had been shy and awkward in her new surroundings, and Tony, instead of getting on with her like a house on fire, had been obviously wondering what old Bob could see in her—he would have loved her just as much, in spite of his vexation. . . . Her eyes! He had never seen such beautiful eyes in any face.—The band was playing the waltz from "Faust". . . . Involuntarily he began sliding his foot towards hers, but, remembering that it might be seen, drew it back again. . . . The evening had been a fizzing success, but now the only thing he wanted was to get rid of Tony, and be alone with her. Well, there was the drive home in the cab. Besides, of course she must come back to his rooms again, to change her frock. So he could afford to wait.

"Oh—the music's stopped. I wish they'd play that thing again," said Clytie.

"Toppin' thing, wasn't it? But I expect they're shuttin' up shop now. Midnight you know. Some footlin' rule of the Lord Mayor's or somebody."

"They are. They're putting away their violins," sighed Clytie.

Le Mesurier got up and walked over to the band.

"I believe he's goin' to try to make 'em play it again," said Jones with a chuckle. "It's no good. I've tried it before now."

Clytie's heart leapt with proud affection as her eyes followed Le Mesurier's tall figure across the room. Wonderful, the way Robin was afraid of nobody! How could she have accused him of always making her give way to him, when really he would take any trouble to gratify her least whim. The manager was chattering and gesticulating, but it would be all right. Captain Jones mightn't be able to manage it, but Robin was different. People always did what he told them. How safe it made her feel to think that he would be always there, all the rest of her life, to make people behave properly to her.

"He's orderin' fizz for the band. That'll do the trick," remarked Jones.

And sure enough the musicians, all smiles, were beginning to take their instruments out of their cases again, and turn over their music.

"Yes—he's not like other men. There's something really great about him," she thought, and Captain Jones echoed her feeling by remarking—

"He's a great fellow is Bob."

"He's simply *splendid*. He always is," cried Clytie. Then her eyes suddenly dilated, and her face grew quite pale. She sat motionless, hardly breathing, staring in an almost dazed amazement at somebody who was sitting with another man at a table at the other end of the room.

This person had been looking at her for some time. He now rose, put down his cigar, and came towards her. Clytie started from her seat, and almost ran to meet him.

"Mr. Buchan——"

"Clytie."

They shook hands, and for a moment neither of them seemed to have anything to say. They stood looking at each other in silence, a target for the curious eyes of the people at the tables round about.

At last Gavin said—"I thought it was you—and yet I couldn't be quite sure. You're so different somehow——"

"No. I'm *not* different. *Why* didn't you come and speak to me? You must have known it was me. I'm just the same."

With a smile which was half-whimsical, half-sad, he glanced from her little gold slippers and billowing tulle skirt, up to the pearls round her neck, and the glossy coils of her hair, and they both knew he was remembering the little short-skirted girl with dishevelled hair and eyes half-blind with crying, from whom he had parted five years before.

"When did you——"

"You've grown up"—they began, both speaking together.

"No, I'm not really," said Clytie with a fleeting smile. And again there was a pause.

"It's great luck meeting you like this," said Gavin in a constrained manner. "I only came here by chance. I thought you'd be in Scotland. . . . Clytie, is that—the man you were sitting with—is that Captain Le Mesurier?"

"Oh *no*. That's just Captain Jones," said Clytie smiling. "There's Robin, coming back now. Please come back with me, and——"

"Thank you. I want to meet him."

As if in a dream, they walked together across the room.

"Robin—this is Mr. Buchan, a very old friend of mine. He's just come back from India." In spite of herself Clytie's voice seemed to her to sound strained and unnatural.

"How d' do. Sit down, won't you, and have some champagne"—said Le Mesurier. He spoke civilly but drily. He had no idea who this Mr. Buchan could be, but could not help feeling that Clytie was somewhat tactless in adding him to their party at this time of the evening.

"Thank you—just for a minute, though. I expect you're going soon——"

Gavin accepted a cigarette out of Le Mesurier's thin gold case, produced a large Bryant and May's match box out of his pocket, and broke a couple of matches before he succeeded in lighting up.

"You must forgive my tacking myself on to you at this time of night," he said, smiling rather shyly. "You see, Clytie and I haven't met for a very long time—not since she was a little girl in fact. I was Johnnie Wyse's tutor before he went to Eton."

"That's who he is, is it," said Le Mesurier to himself, and endeavoured to look more cordial. But the band had been playing the waltz from "Faust" for the last five minutes, and Clytie had not even noticed it. He thought he had deserved at least a glance of thanks for his pains.

"Er—yes of course, I've heard the Wyse's talk of you. Won't you have some champagne—or a peg?" he said.

"No thank you. How are they all at Brocksden, Clytie? Is Lady Cecily in Town, too? And Johnnie? How is the old fellow?"

"Aunt Cecily and Uncle Peter are both here. We're staying in South Street, 55. Johnnie's at Oxford," said Clytie, speaking

with difficulty. . . . With a desperate effort to speak naturally and break the chill which seemed to have fallen upon the party, she continued—

"You'll come and see us to-morrow—won't you, and to Brocksden too of course. Won't you, Mr. Buchan?"

"Good Lord—why does she ask him to come to Brocksden?" thought Robin with rising irritation, which showed itself in the expressionless voice with which he inquired—

"How long have you been back from—Egypt is it?"

"About a month."

"And you never let me know. Why didn't you write?" cried Clytie.

"I've been rather busy taking a house for my mother, and so on. She's been ill, I'm sorry to say."

Clytie murmured how sorry she was. She hoped she was better now; and there was another silence.

"Surely he'll go now," thought Le Mesurier.

The band had finished the "Faust" by this time, and the conductor turned and glanced interrogatively towards Le Mesurier.

"They were going to play one last piece, Clytie . . . but perhaps you don't care about it?" he said stiffly.

Suddenly realising the cloud on his face, and her own blatant ingratitude, Clytie flushed hotly, and gazed at him with dismayed eyes.

"Oh Robin, they've been playing it again and I wasn't listening. . . . And I never thanked you. *Do* forgive me."

"Oh it's all right," said Le Mesurier, giving a little nod to the conductor. The band with a flourish began playing the simple old Scotch melody of "Robin Adair".

"What's this they're playing? Scotch isn't it? 'Weel may the keel row' or something"—remarked Jones.

"Something of that sort," said Le Mesurier, glancing at Clytie.

She smiled back at him a little uncertainly, and suddenly he felt a hot appealing hand clasp his under the shelter of the table-cloth.

"It's some sort of Scotch medley. I fished it out of their music. . . . I thought you'd like it"—he added in a lower voice, and from his smile she knew that she was forgiven. "Those Hungarian fellows play it rather well, don't they? You'd think their hearts were aching with love of Scotland."

Clytie said nothing, for at the sound of the old familiar tunes, memory seemed to rise like a giant, and took possession of her soul.

. . . My love she's but a lassie yet,
 A hilty skilty lassie yet,
 It scarce wad do tae sit an' woo
 Wi' her that's but a lassie yet.

April in Scotland; grey skies, the river still red from yesterday's spate, and the east wind blowing her hair across her eyes and making it all but impossible for Gavin to keep his line in the water.

Ca' the yowes tae the nowes,
 Ca' them whaur the heather grows,
 Ca' them whaur the burnie rows,
 My bonnie dearie. . . .

Summer of course—summer among the hills at Standalone; a wee bare-legged girl wading in the burn, and Eppie Cameron coming along the bank above her, singing this very song.—How could it remind her of anything but Standalone? Yet there had been heather on the Lammermoors too.—She could see it still in flower, though the bracken was turning. The sheep were browsing on the slopes of Lammer Law, and the three of them were sitting eating their lunch by the side of the Adder, Johnnie, and herself, and Gavin.

"What's this one, Clytie? I like it. I've heard it before."

"It's Burns' song—'Ae fond kiss and then we sever'."

"Now what a silly thing to do," remarked Jones facetiously; but nobody heeded him, for the room was filled with the passionate wailing of the violins, telling them of the aching despair of hopeless love.—

Had we never lov'd sae kindly,
 Had we never lov'd sae blindly,
 Never met, or never parted,
 We had ne'er been broken hearted.

"That's 'Old Lang Syne' now. I always know that," said Jones proudly. "They always play it at the end, don't you know. Yes, now you see they've stopped. Top-hole music that. Beats your Waggner's hollow—eh what?"

The room was almost empty by now, and the lights went suddenly down. "Time to orf it I'm afraid" said Jones, and they all rose and began walking towards the door. As Le Mesurier, who had stayed behind a moment to pay the bill, followed them, he could not help reflecting that Buchan's was the most old-fashioned and shiny tail coat he had ever seen sported in a place like the Eldorado! Poor chap—he was probably hard up. His heart warmed towards him, and he wished he had been more

cordial. A nice quiet fellow he seemed,—absolutely a Sahib too ;—and how like Clytie it had been to welcome him with open arms and compel him to join their party ! Most girls, if they had seen their cousin's old tutor at the Eldorado, would hardly have bothered to bow to him. And to think he had shown temper to her about it—his little Clytie. Well, he would make it up to her on the drive home. A few weeks ago he would have scarcely risked doing more than hold her hand, the wild timid young thing. But things were different now, though he would still go warily—until there was no more need. . . . Tony would twig he wasn't wanted now, and he must get rid of this other fellow as civilly and speedily as possible. Then they would go off to his rooms, just Clytie and himself, and have—say ten minutes there alone together before he took her home.

With smiling lips and something of "the towering male" in his carriage, he walked up to Clytie and Gavin, who were standing together in the lobby, both of them silent.

"Where's Tony ? Fetching our coats ? Call a hansom, will you"—to the porter, who put his whistle to his lips. "Well, Clytie, it's about time for us to go." . . . But the hansom had not yet appeared.

"Perhaps we may run across you in India," said Robin to Gavin in a friendly manner.

"In India ?" said Gavin, looking completely puzzled——

"Yes. We expect my regiment to go there in the autumn." As he spoke the thought struck him that possibly Buchan did not know they were engaged ; so he added with a short laugh—"I'm taking for granted that you know we're going to be married, but perhaps——"

"Er yes—yes. I did know about it"—said Gavin speaking rather hurriedly and looking out into the side street down which two bright lights accompanied by a jingling of bells were approaching : "I saw the announcement in the papers soon after I got home. That's your hansom I think. I must be going too. But first, may I congratulate you."

"Thanks very much. I hope you're coming to our wedding," said Robin smiling, and turning towards Jones who came out of the cloakroom with their coats over his arm.

"I wish I could, but I'm afraid I can't manage it. I shall be gone by then."

"But you're not going away without coming to Brocksden," said Clytie quickly.

"I'm afraid—I must, Clytie. I had hoped to manage it, but—"

I find I can't now. I've been kept here by my mother's illness, and later on I'm going to Italy for the last few weeks of my leave. Robin Swinton—you know—he and I are going to walk through the Apennines."

Clytie was afraid to trust herself to speak. She stood looking straight in front of her, her hands clenched under her cloak to prevent herself bursting into tears. Then she realised that Robin was looking at her, and expecting her to make the move.

"Good night, Captain Jones"—she said, her lips smiling mechanically.

"Good night, Miss MacLeod. It's been a toppin' evening." His genial face beamed with honest approval of his pal's choice. "But we'll meet again soon, I hope."

"Good night, Clytie. I'll call at South Street to-morrow, or the day after, if I may——"

Le Mesurier helped her into the cab, carefully keeping her tulle skirt off the wheel.

"Good night" he called to the two figures left behind in the doorway. Then, as they bowled out of the entry and down the Strand, he said in a voice of half-jesting remonstrance—

"My dear girl—when the time comes to go away, there's a great merit in going on the nail. Some women get everybody on to their feet, and then remember half a dozen things more they want to say; but you mustn't be like that. When you have to make the move—and you'll almost always have to—simply say good night, and we can orf it at once."

"Yes, Robin."

"I say cabby—go by —— Street, will you."

"Right sir," said the driver smiling to himself, and a moment later they left the brilliant lights of the Strand and turned up a side street.

"This was why I was impatient to get away," whispered Robin, leaning towards her and beginning to slip his hand under her *bermous*. For a moment she remained sitting stiffly upright, clasping her bunch of roses, whose chilly stalks met her lover's exploring fingers.

"Chuck away those flowers, Clytie. They must be withered."

She looked down at them and gave a little shiver.

"Poor things. They're dead. But I'd like to keep them"—she murmured.

"Put them down on the seat then. You don't want them in your hands"—

Feeling him draw her gently towards him, she resisted for a

moment, and then, with a movement that was at once childlike and passionate, threw herself into his arms.

2

Not a suspicion had been aroused in Lady Cecily of the escapade of the night before. She had been safely asleep two hours before Clytie, stepping noiselessly on silk stockinged feet, had stolen up to her room. Watkins had of course been perfectly aware of her young lady's absence, and in response to her mistress's inquiry "Has Miss Clytie gone to bed?" had diplomatically responded "Why it's past eleven, m'lady. Miss Clytie always goes at ten." There was nothing therefore to disturb the pleasure which Lady Cecily felt next morning in telling of the charming plan which she and her hostess had concocted the night before. The latter possessed a pleasant cottage on the Thames, which she had offered to lend the Wyse for the week-end. Johnnie could bicycle over from Eton; and if Captain Le Mesurier cared to bring one of his brother officers she would be delighted. Lady Cecily, although she had been displeased with Captain Le Mesurier for his pertinacity over the Ascot affair, was glad to have such an ample *quid pro quo* to offer him for his disappointment. Sir Peter thought a few days in the country—amazing thing the way people flocked into town for the best months of the year!—was an excellent idea. Le Mesurier was pleased, and said, if he might, he would bring his friend, Jones. It was a most harmonious luncheon.

Le Mesurier intercepted his aunt elect as she was going upstairs for her afternoon rest.

"I say Lady Cecily—I thought of taking Clytie to the gardens at Kew this afternoon. The bluebells are out there now."

"Well, Robert—er—it is most kind of you, and I am sure Clytie would enjoy it. She is so fond of flowers. But—er——"

Finally she consented, on condition that they were back in time for tea.

Flushed with triumph, Le Mesurier sought out Clytie, and found her sitting with a book in the drawing-room window.

"Go and get on your hat, Clytie."

"Why, Robin? I don't think I particularly want to go out this afternoon. I've rather a headache."

"Fresh air's the best thing for it then. Why have you a headache though? One might almost think you'd had a night out—been drinking champagne or something! Run along now."

"I'd really rather not."

"Not go to—Kew?" he asked, smiling slyly.

"Kew—to-day?"

"Yes. Kew and the bluebells. But perhaps you still don't want to go?" He stood, waiting to see her listless face light up with pleasure.

"Couldn't we go another day? Should you mind if——"

"Yes, I should mind, rather," he said, trying to disguise his chagrin. "Lady Cecily's said we can go to-day, but she may change her mind, or want to come too, if we put it off till to-morrow. Besides I'm engaged to-morrow. . . . However, if you don't care about it, we'll chuck the idea."

Clytie flushed, and said quickly—

"Of course we won't, Robin. I'd love to come. It was only, I thought—But it doesn't matter. I'll go and get ready at once."

"But look here, Clytie, if your head's really bad——"

"It's nothing, Robin. I don't mind a bit."

"That's right. Take an aspirin though. Then it'll be gone before we get there."

Why, *why* had she not told him her real reason for not wanting to go out this afternoon? she asked herself angrily as she ran upstairs. It would have been so simple, and it was underhand, hardly true really, to pretend it was her headache. Dabbing some eau-de-Cologne on her throbbing temples, she looked at herself in the glass, decided that she was very plain, decided too that in the future she would always tell Robin her real reason, whatever it was. She couldn't very well tell him now however, or he would still think she didn't want to go. . . . And quite likely Mr. Buchan wouldn't come here to-day after all. So she pinned on her new hat and went downstairs.

Under the circumstances Le Mesurier thought himself entitled to put a liberal construction upon Lady Cecily's stipulation that they should be back in time for tea, and it was nearly six before he and Clytie re-entered the drawing-room. The tea table was still there however, and Lady Cecily sitting by it, evidently with news to impart.

"*Who* do you think has been calling on me, Clytie, while you have been out. If I gave you a hundred guesses you would never guess right! Of all the people one would least expect to meet——"

She came to a tantalising pause. As Clytie said nothing, Le Mesurier inquired with a polite effort to seem interested—

"Anyone I know?"

"Well, curiously enough you do, although he did not seem to remember where he had met you.—Mr. Buchan! There Clytie. I thought I should astonish you. Mr. Buchan! I positively could not believe my eyes when he walked into the room. He is home from India on short leave he tells me, but he goes away again very soon; so if I had not been in we should have missed him. He is as nice as ever, Clytie, though he looks older and his hair is turning a little grey——"

"It isn't"—exclaimed Clytie.

Le Mesurier's eyes scowled warningly at her. She changed colour, bit her lip, and looked down.

"Yes, I'm afraid it is, Clytie. You must remember it is a long time since you saw him, and he is no longer quite a young man. He was most interested to hear about Johnnie, and asked me all sorts of questions about him, which shows how attached to him he still is. He seemed so anxious to meet him again that—I don't know if you will approve, Robert"—Lady Cecily laughed a little nervously—"but I am afraid I asked him to join us on the river while Johnnie is there—only for a couple of nights however. It will make us rather a large party perhaps, but I feel sure Johnnie will be pleased."

"I think that's quite a good move," said Le Mesurier.

Lady Cecily beamed. "I was afraid perhaps I had been a little impulsive"—she confessed, "and that you might be disappointed at a comparative stranger being added to our little party. But I assure you, he is the quietest and most unassuming person to have in the house. We had him at Brocksden for nearly three years you know, and we quite missed him when he left. He was most interested to hear about your engagement, Clytie."

"Didn't he know?" said Clytie.

Again Le Mesurier frowned warningly at her.

"Er yes—he had seen the announcement, he said, in the 'Morning Post'. But naturally he knew no details. He was most interested, I can assure you. Indeed, we sat here talking for nearly two hours."

"I say, Clytie!" exclaimed Le Mesurier with a burst of laughter when Lady Cecily had left the room: "That was sailing pretty near the wind, wasn't it? I was afraid you'd give us away every minute. How *he* didn't, I can't imagine, but I dare say Tony gave him the tip after we left him. Sensible fellow, to have completely forgotten where he met me! I say though—I wish your aunt hadn't asked him for the week-end. Rather a bore isn't it?"

With an effort at complete sincerity, Clytie looked straight at him, and answered—

"Oh no, Robin. I'm awfully glad she did. I'm so fond of him, and I'm sure you'll like him too."

3

It was that halcyon hour of a fine English day when afternoon almost imperceptibly merges into evening. The air was balmy with the scent of summer; sweet briar and clover, roses red and white, meadow-sweet and honeysuckle, all seemed to pour forth their fragrance as an oblation to the declining sun. The Sturchel garden ran down to the edge of the backwater; and although Mrs. Smith's gardener had laboriously rooted up every dandelion and daisy from the sloping lawn, he had spared the strip of grass along the river's brim, permitting them to wanton there, although the forget-me-nots and water marigolds did their best to drive them to the upper slopes again. Seen from the river it was an earthly paradise, and the old gentleman in the hired boat who was rowing up the backwater, bestowed a passing envy upon the happy beings who dwelt there. One of them, a youngish man in white flannel trousers and a tweed jacket, was lying on the bank even now. Lucky dog! He didn't look as if he had an office to force him back to town by the first train next day! . . . Such were the old gentleman's meditations, until his quiet and leisurely progress brought him to a point whence he got a transitory glimpse of the "lucky dog's" face. Ah! So there was perhaps a serpent in this Eden also. Poor fellow.—And yet, thought the old gentleman who was something of a philosopher, what an absurd waste of life's amenities, to be young, and idle, and to lie by the river in an English garden, yet look as downcast as that!

He rowed on, and Gavin continued to lie there, face downwards on the grass, small tufts of which he picked with restless fingers, and threw away again. Suddenly he looked round, and his cheeks flushed, while the sombre expression in his eyes vanished. Clytie was running towards him across the grass. She was alone. Nobody else was with her. He jumped up and went forward to meet her.

"Give me the cushions. Where are the others?" he asked.

"Johnnie has gone off with that horrid bicycle of his to the garage."

"Not again?"

"Yes again. It's dreadful. It never seems to go right for one

day now. I wish he'd sell it. And Robin's writing a letter, something that must go by this post—but he'll come when he's finished. So then," she went on, laughing, and the look of controlled eagerness which had appeared in his eyes seemed to be reflected in hers—"I simply hurried away in case Captain Jones wanted to come; and—do let us go off at once, in the canoe, for if he comes we'll have to take the punt."

Without comment Gavin jumped into the punt which was moored by the bank, and began untying the canoe which floated beyond it.

"Be quick!" cried Clytie's voice behind him; "I think I see his blazer coming round the house!"

He held out his hand. Scarcely touching it, she sprang in. He seated himself opposite her and pushed off.

"We might just go down as far as the river, then we can be back by the time Robin's ready," said Clytie.

They glided away in silence down the enchanted stream, with fields on either side of them in which placid cows chewed the buttercup cud. A lark sang in the sky over their heads, and every tree hid some summer songster. They passed by a red-tiled cottage covered with gloire de Dijon roses. Once they had to duck as they went under the overhanging branches of a syringa bush. Then they came to a line of laburnums overhanging the river so that the water beneath them was a carpet of rippling gold.

"My God! How beautiful England is! I had forgotten it was as good as this"—said Gavin.

"But India—it's beautiful too?"

"Hideous—the Punjab anyhow"—said Gavin with conviction. "As flat as your hand, and an absolutely dead horizon, dust or dried mud wherever you look—except in Spring of course, but everywhere's beautiful in Spring. Even the grass is all prickly in India."

At this moment he hated India with a bitter hatred.

"But Robin says"—began Clytie, then her voice sank into silence, and the sentence was never completed. Neither of them spoke until at the end of the backwater the river itself came into sight, with boats passing, sculled or punted by young men in flannels, and gay with women's parasols. Somewhat rowdy laughter, and the notes of a gramophone, mingled with the song of the birds, for it was Saturday afternoon, and half Suburbia was on the water.

"Other people. . . Lots of them"—exclaimed Clytie in horror.

"Yes. The world's full of them"—said Gavin with a whimsical twist of his mouth. Turning the canoe he began paddling back again as quickly as possible until the curving bank once again hid

the populous river from their sight. Then with two strokes he turned the canoe into a small creek which was overhung by the branches of a great horse chestnut. There they paused, and for several minutes neither of them spoke.

" . . . But we aren't talking," said Clytie at last. "We're wasting time. And there's such an awful lot to say——"

"Well. . . . I don't quite know where to begin. There's so little time. . . . I must have my pipe, if I'm going to talk."

"Is it in your coat? Here it is."

"Thanks. And the tobacco pouch please. Thank you very much, Clytie." Meditatively he began pressing the tobacco down with his finger.

"It's a very old coat, isn't it?" suggested Clytie with her eyes fixed on the patched elbow.

"It's a very good coat"—said Gavin rather indignantly. "I've had that coat ten years now. I'm very much attached to it."

With a tiny splash and a widening circle in the water, a trout rose beside the canoe.

"D'you remember"—cried Clytie, "the day you caught that enormous trout by the willow tree."

"What—the one that got away just as you were landing it?"

"Yes—and you said—Oh damn you, Clytie——"

"Never. What I said was 'My dear child, try to be more careful'."

They both burst out laughing.

"I do remember being pretty sick about it, for it was the first decent sized fish I'd ever caught."

"Was it?" Clytie gazed at him in consternation. "If I'd known that——"

"Absolutely. My others, and there were jolly few of them, were about the size of minnows. I remember feeling ashamed of them when they came into breakfast, and Sir Peter saying the small ones had the most delicate flavour. Wasn't it like him? . . . I wouldn't look so distressed, Clytie. You couldn't help it."

"But . . . I did it on purpose!"

"What?"

"Yes I did, though I never said a word at the time. I didn't dare."

"It was just as well you didn't. My superb trout!—A two pounder at least.—Why on earth did you——"

"I'll tell you. You remember how it happened? You said 'My word, this is a big one,' and I was so excited I ran right into the water with my shoes and stockings. You were reeling him in,

and there he was, quite tired out, being dragged through the water towards me, and I was just slipping the landing net under him, when I saw his face—and it was so frightened and helpless, I couldn't bear it. . . . So I jabbed at the line with my net, and the hook gave and he swam away. . . . Are you very angry ?”

“Horribly. . . . Look at my angry face.”

They both laughed again, for this was an old joke, being Sir Peter's invariable reproof to his retriever when he begged at meals.

For the moment all their constraint and shyness was gone—gone too the rising tide of bewildered pain which both had felt lapping around their feet, and desperately tried to ignore and conceal, as they glided up the river. That tide had ebbed now, leaving a stretch of golden sand before them. It was as if the old days had returned again.

“D'you remember the day Johnnie said . . .”

“Do you remember Lady Cecily sending you up to your room because . . .”

Suddenly Clytie interrupted herself to say—“But I want to hear all about you in India. You haven't told me anything about that yet—and we'll soon have to be going back.”

“Tell me about yourself first, Clytie, you've far more to tell than I have. And I know nothing—not even when you put up your hair and went to dances. Nothing in particular has happened to me, and *everything* to you.”

He spoke meaningly, but she answered rather quickly “No, please not. I don't want to—I mean I'll tell you another time. Please tell me about yourself in India, Mr. Buchan.”

Gavin was puffing reflectively at his pipe.

“You still call me Mr. Buchan”—he remarked.

“Yes . . . I always did.”

“I always called you Clytie. And I'm always going to. . . . I say, Clytie—won't you call me Gavin now ?”

“I'd love to—Gavin,” she answered with a faint rather tremulous smile.

“That's better. Well, where shall I begin ? It's pretty dull I warn you. After I went out, I was master for a bit at a rather pathetic school for native Christians ; but I got out of that, and got another job at a school in Peshawar. Then about three years ago I was taken on pukka as Professor at a big college in a place called Lahore.”

“Do you like that ?”

“Yes, on the whole I think I do. I like my chocolate-coloured students. They've every failing under the sun, and yet—one gets

rather fond of them. I play cricket and hockey with them, and——"

"I play hockey, Gavin!"

"Do you little woman?"

The old endearment had slipped out unawares, and for the moment, so natural did it seem, it passed unnoticed. Then both changed colour, Gavin flushing a deep red, and Clytie growing rather pale. Neither dared to look at the other. The silence lengthened, and with it Clytie's despairing resistance to a sense of irrevocable disaster.

"In those days I lived in a chummery with three other fellows called Smith and Burrel and Baker," went on Gavin suddenly, as if there had been no interlude to his narrative.

"Was that nice?"

"No. It was rather beastly, though they weren't bad chaps really. Burrel was a science man, and Smith was a confirmed yatterer. Luckily neither Baker nor myself wanted to talk much."

"But Gavin—why didn't you have a house of your own?"

"Well you see, Clytie, my mother's not at all well off. But she would send us to decent schools and to Cambridge and so on, and to do this she had to borrow money. Well, naturally I wanted to pay that off before doing anything else. So I lived at the chummery because it was a good deal cheaper."

... So this explained that shiny dress coat which Robin had joked about, and the cheap canvas shoes which he was wearing now, when the others wore white buckskin boots, and the patch on his jacket. It wasn't because he didn't care for nice clothes. Simply, he was too poor to buy them. A smarting sensation came to her eyes and a lump into her throat. She moved restlessly in her place, making the canoe rock and slip away from the bank.

"I took a bungalow though, later on, when my mother came out to stay with me," said Gavin laying hold of a branch to arrest their drifting progress. "She came for a year, but she was so happy, poor dear, I persuaded her to stay on. The fact is, Clytie, my brother hasn't been very satisfactory. He's in the army, so perhaps it isn't altogether his fault, but he keeps getting into debt and letting mother get him out of it again—really a damnable thing to do when she has so little. Then the next thing was, he married rather an undesirable girl—not an actress or anything of that sort, but just rather common, 'Not quite one of us' as Lady Cecily used to say—though by the by I expect that's how she would describe



LOVE IN A MIST

mother and myself, if she wasn't too kind. But anyhow, my mother felt it a good deal, and unfortunate letters were written. So I thought she'd be happier in India with me."

"You are very good," said Clytie in a low voice.

"There was really nothing else to be done. She had barely enough to live on at home, and we were fairly well off living together out there. She had a pony to drive about, and of course in the hot weather she went to the hills. She always loved India. She told me she hadn't been so happy since my father died." He hesitated, then added with a touch of bitterness in his voice—"Only, of course it meant I never could afford to go home for my leave, as most fellows did."

Without looking at him, Clytie said in a low voice—"Why did you never write to me?"

For a moment Gavin made no reply, and after waiting, she went on—"I wrote to you . . . a long letter . . . and Aunt Cecily wouldn't let me send it. She said it was unsuitable." She gave a little uneven laugh. "And I hadn't your address."

Gavin's eyes were fixed on the bottom of the boat. With an effort he said—"That was just it. Lady Cecily asked me not to write to you, before I left Brocksden. And I told her I must write sometimes. Then Sir Peter spoke to me about it, and said he thought I had better not. If he thought so too, I supposed he was right. So there it was."

"But I hadn't your address. I meant, when you wrote to me and told me where you were—I meant to—I would have written to you, whatever Aunt Cecily said. And I waited and waited for a letter . . . but it never came, only the little peacock brooch at Christmas. And I couldn't even thank you for it, because I didn't know where you were."

"Perhaps I was wrong," said Gavin in a low voice. "I don't know. When a child's guardians ask you not to write to her, what can you do?"

His downcast face was almost scowling, and the lines round his mouth had deepened. He looked away across the river, and then back at Clytie, and suddenly he smiled. "I like your man, Clytie," he said. "I wanted to tell you this before, but I hadn't the chance. I think he's a splendid fellow."

When he had said this he looked away again, so he did not see the slight start which she gave, and which was succeeded by a burning flush which might have been either pleasure or shame. He only heard her voice, a little breathlessly, answering,

"I'm so very glad. And—if you knew him better——"

"He wants knowing, certainly. But I've seen enough of him to—to see that he's very fond of you, Clytie."

"Yes. Yes he is," she answered in a low voice.

"I don't wonder you fell in love with him," said Gavin rather unsteadily. He let go of the chestnut bough, and they began slowly drifting out into the stream.

"You were telling me about your mother," said Clytie, breaking the silence.

"Was I? Yes. Well—she got ill, and had to have an operation. I brought her home for it last month. She's getting over it all right, but they can't tell. It may come back again. She's in a nursing home now having a rest cure. You see, she guessed something was awfully wrong, months before she told me, and it's rather broken down her nerves. Nobody is allowed to see her just now, so I thought I'd go abroad for a bit and get it off my mind. I shall come back to settle her into the house I've taken for her—quite a jolly little house with a garden she can sit out in—before I sail."

"But who will look after her."

"The doctor's found a nice woman to do that, a nurse. Mother saw her and likes her. It's the best I can do, but the whole thing's damnable. Perhaps Charles and his wife may be a comfort to her. They made it up before her operation. You know, Clytie—it's cancer, though we haven't told her."

The afternoon was waning. A chilly wind had risen, ruffling the surface of the water so that it began to lap against the side of the canoe like the low impatient knocking of a lover's hand against a closed door. A pile of clouds had drifted across the sun turning the world into a grey sad place.

Clytie's eyes were full of tears.

"And you must leave her. Oh Gavin, your poor poor mother." Gavin bent forward and took her hand.

"Thank you, Clytie. I knew you'd understand," he said.

He took up the paddle and guided the canoe out into the current. As he did so the clouds parted and the sun, bursting through, flooded the landscape with a rosy light.

"Look at the sun! It's nearly setting. We shall be late for Robin"—cried Clytie in dismay.

"The current's with us now. We'll soon be back. Don't be distressed, Clytie. He won't mind waiting a little."

"He *will* mind."

"It can't be helped. I'm going as fast as I can."

The fair country-side which they had rejoiced in on their

LOVE IN A MIST

leisurely progress up, shot past them now unnoticed. The wind whipped their cheeks, then died away as suddenly as it had come, but a cool air rose from the water.

"I don't believe you're warm enough in that thin frock. Put my coat on," said Gavin.

As she slipped the old grey tweed jacket round her shoulders, he bent forward to help her, and their hands met.

"That way's no good. Put it on properly, and button it up."

He spoke almost harshly, and an expression like the scowl of pain produced by an aching tooth came over his face. He sat back again and went on paddling.

In about ten minutes the Sturchel garden came into sight, with two tall figures in white flannels strolling up and down the grass. Pretending not to see the approaching canoe, Le Mesurier continued talking to Jones, until they were almost at the bank.

"I say Le Mesurier, I'm afraid we've kept you waiting," sang out Gavin.

Le Mesurier glanced round as if noticing them for the first time.

"Here we all are again!" observed Jones cheerfully. He disliked a strained atmosphere, and always endeavoured to dispel it. In this instance, however, he sympathised with Bob's obvious indignation. After all, it was pretty cool of that tutor fellow to go off with his girl like this, when it had been arranged they should all go together!

"It took longer to get back than I expected. Very sorry. Hope you haven't been waiting long," said Gavin shipping his paddle, and catching hold of the punt.

"Doesn't matter. Hardly worth going out again now though. Nearly time to dress for dinner"—observed Le Mesurier in an expressionless voice. He came down leisurely to the water, and held out a cool firm hand to help Clytie on to the bank.

There was an uncomfortable silence while Gavin collected the cushions and stepped ashore also.

"Oh come along, Bob. There's lots of time. May as well have a sail before dinner. Miss Clytie hasn't seen me punt yet"—remarked Jones.

But Le Mesurier had turned away from the little group, and was strolling back towards the house.

Clytie caught him up. "Oh Robin—I'm so dreadfully sorry. Do come back"—she whispered.

He walked on without looking at her. He was indeed so profoundly chagrined at having, as he told himself, been made a fool of before Jones, that the most adequate expression of his feelings

would have been to box her ears. This being impossible, he was in the mood to sulk for the rest of the evening. After a minute he turned his head slightly towards her, his face as blank and expressionless as the sea in a fog, and found her eyes fixed upon him with an expression of appealing distress that almost amounted to fear. Good God! Was it possible that Clytie was *afraid* of him? He put out his hand and slipped it through her arm.

"Ne me regarde pas ainsi, ma p'tite. Je suis joliment enragé, mais pas tant que ça," he murmured. In a sharper tone he added,

"For God's sake don't cry, Clytie. They'll see you. . . . Look here—would you like to bathe?"

Speechlessly, with swimming eyes and closely set lips which tried to smile, she nodded.

"Well—I brought your bathing dress. It's in the punt. Come along. I'll take you up to that little wood, and we can undress among the trees. 'Highly unsuitable'—eh? Hullo, Buchan—you might leave the cushions will you. I'll take Clytie out for a bit."

"I didn't *mean* to be late, Robin——"

"Don't do it again then. It was my fault for writing letters. . . . I say, don't tell those other fellows we're going to bathe."

As they walked back towards the landing-place, he added, with a slight return of "the mood" in his voice—

"—And give Mr. Buchan back his coat. You look ridiculous in it. I've brought yours. I know by this time that you always forget it."

4

It was Sunday evening, and they had an unexpected addition to their party in the shape of the rightful owner of the house, Mrs. Smith. This lady (*—née* Talbot) was Lady Cecily's first cousin, and although they were as unlike each other in appearance and temperament as even cousins can be, there existed between them a considerable affection. Mrs. Smith therefore, having taken it into her head that she would like to see how Cecily and her house-party of young men were getting on, had motored down for tea, and been persuaded to remain for the night. It was a warm evening. The curtains were drawn back from the open French windows so that the company could look out on to the lawn and rose garden which were dimly visible

by the light of the stars ; and the fairies in the garden (yes reader, there are always fairies in an English garden) could peep in at the mortals in the room. If they did so they saw Sir Peter sitting stiffly upright in a chair, endeavouring to keep awake, and longing sadly for the domesticity of Brocksden where, stretched on a sofa, he could read his book in peace ; Mrs. Smith and Captain Jones bending their heads together over Mrs. Smith's large kodak, in which something had stuck and refused to move ; and Clytie and Robin sitting side by side on the window seat. They were waiting for Gavin to come back, for he had gone up to his room to fetch the wedding present which he said he had brought from India for Clytie—"Though how he came to buy you a wedding present, when he didn't know you were going to be married, I can't make out," said Le Mesurier. Clytie had no solution to offer for this riddle, so Le Mesurier presently decided that Buchan must have brought one or two home on spec, because somebody one knows is generally going to be married. Fervently he hoped that it might not be a gold-embroidered tea cloth or door curtain. "If it is, Clytie, you'll have to leave it at home. Really you will. Those things look all right in England, but you've no idea how it stamps you to have 'em in India."

"You need not be afraid," said Clytie rather dryly. "Gavin has particularly good taste."

Robin noticed that she called him now by his Christian name, whereas he was pretty certain it had been "Mr. Buchan" at the Eldorado. He could not very well object, but he silently wished that she would not do it. The fact was, he did not particularly care for the fellow, though for the life of him he could not say why. Perhaps it dated from his taking her off in the canoe down the river, and himself consequently losing his temper, and being rather a beast to Clytie when she came back.—Why on earth had Lady Cecily asked him down to be odd man out at this pleasant little party? It was idiotic, really, and it had quite prevented Clytie's getting to know dear old Tony better. Not that there was anything objectionable about Buchan : he was pleasant enough, and in his quiet way rather amusing sometimes ; only, as things were, he was unnecessary. And now half the evening would be wasted admiring his beastly present and so on. Why couldn't he have a little tact, and talk to Lady Cecily, or somebody? Surely he might have realised that as he, Le Mesurier, was going back to Aldershot to-morrow, he would want on this last evening to have Clytie to himself.

Clytie broke into his meditations by saying, in a rather appealing voice—"You know, Robin, I *like* wedding presents. I can't help liking them."

"Well, the first wedding present we have to give is going to be those appalling silver vases of Mrs. Mappett's."

"Oh Robin—what a splendid idea! But just think if she found out!"

Gavin had come into the room again. Sitting down on the end of the window seat, he shyly and rather awkwardly handed a small box across Le Mesurier's knees to Clytie.

"Find India a good place for buying things?" inquired Robin, inwardly fretting with impatience at the slowness with which Clytie was untying the string and taking off the wrappings. Good Lord! If she felt even half he did, would she not hurry through this tiresome business, and say "thank you" for her present, and then slip away with him into the garden.

"Rugs if you can afford them, and brass if you like it—that's about all," said Gavin. "Personally I don't buy things if I can help it. I don't like spending money!"

A softly breathed "O—h" from Clytie interrupted a conversation in which neither felt the least interest. They turned towards her and saw that she was gazing, fascinated, at a pear-shaped green stone which lay in her hand. It was a flawed emerald, polished but uncut, and threaded on a string of milky seed pearls. Lying in Clytie's white palm, with the electric light shining through it, it gave forth a dull glow which was rather uncanny, like the single eye of a Polyphemus.

"Oh"—murmured Clytie. "Oh Gavin!—Look at it, Robin. . . . It's like the jewelled fruit in Aladdin's wicked uncle's garden."

"Do you like it, Clytie?" asked Gavin, his face flushing with pleasure.

"*Like* it!" She looked up at him with glowing eyes. "I simply love it. It's wonderful. It looks as if it was alive."

"Awfully good of you, Buchan. It's—er—a remarkable stone," said Le Mesurier in a voice of forced cordiality. His taste in jewellery as in other things was fastidious. He did not like this thing at all. It was badly flawed, and its barbaric beauty left him cold. Besides—it must have cost a considerable sum. He hated the idea of Buchan, who was evidently as hard up as possible, spending his money on an ornament which he personally was quite resolved Clytie should never wear in public. . . . And that would mean a quarrel probably, as she was apparently much taken with

it. . . . Such were the thoughts on the surface of his mind. Underneath smouldered an angry feeling that he did not choose to allow other men to give valuable jewels to his wife. Buchan ought to have realised it was not the thing to do. Under any other circumstances he would have put his foot down of course, and made her give it back: but this idiotic convention about marriage presents absolutely tied him. And now, here was Lady Cecily coming across the room to see it, which meant a lot more jawing and waste of time. He sat contemplating the ornament, with a conventional smile on his lips, but a bored cross expression in his eyes.

"It is *very* quaint. Quite an ornament for an Eastern queen," Lady Cecily was saying.

Clytie immediately twisted it round her forehead, and, striking an attitude, announced—"I am Cleopatra—and the serpent of the Nile!"

"Really, Clytie! You are too childish. Let me look at it closer dear. What dear little seed pearls. . . . But really, Mr. Buchan—an emerald? This is very extravagant."

—So Lady Cecily did not think it suitable either. Robin's heart warmed towards her.

"It's not worth much I'm afraid. It's flawed you know. As a matter of fact"—Gavin lowered his voice mysteriously and half turned towards Clytie—"I got it as part of a bribe. It's easy to acquire trifles of that sort in India if one's in a really important position as I am."

Lady Cecily looked bewildered, but deciding after a moment's reflection that it was a joke, laughed politely.

"Of course, a professor at a *Government* college!"—murmured Clytie.

"Yes. I set the examination papers you see," said Gavin.

"I daresay you've feathered your nest well by this time"—she responded. Then suddenly, to her horror, she felt her eyes filling with tears. She turned her face quickly away, and leaning out of the window pretended to be smelling a rose.

"There! It is all right now. Thank you, Captain Jones, for your invaluable assistance." Mrs. Smith's triumphant voice summoned the party from the window. "Now I want all of you—please—to come into the hall and group yourselves at the foot of the staircase. Cecily, I am going to ring for your footman to help me with the flash-light apparatus."

There was crisp decision in Mrs. Smith's tones, an amiable taking for granted that nobody could wish not to do what she told

them, which was irresistible. Everybody began submissively trooping out into the hall.

"What a ghastly bore! She did us all this afternoon. I refuse to be photographed again" . . . grumbled Le Mesurier bringing up the rear with Jones.

"Oh come along, Bob. She's really keen on it. It won't take long." . . .

"I hate this sort of thing."

He submitted to be led into the hall nevertheless, where he stood observing the proceedings with a funereal expression.

"I want Clytie to sit on the lowest step between Captain Le Mesurier and Captain Jones.—No, the second step please. That will be better. Cecily. . . You must—No, stay where you are. That is excellent. The rest of you must sit on the third step. Now if you all look plain but jocose, it will be exactly like a wedding group."

"You needn't think I'm going to consent to do this sort of thing at our wedding," Le Mesurier muttered to Clytie.

Lady Cecily overheard him, and her face assumed an expression of silken obstinacy.

"Let me look now. . . . Sir Peter, your right arm is out of the picture. A little more that way. That's all right. And Captain Jones—would you mind drawing in your feet——"

"I'll sit on 'em if you like, Mrs. Smith."

"No, no—that will do quite well. Now. Are you ready?—Do you understand what you have to do, Thomas?" (to the footman whose name was George). "When I say *Go*, you just turn that handle down as far as it will go. . . . Now—you must keep perfectly still please, as it is a time exposure. Are you ready. *Go*."

A rigid silence ensued, broken by a wild "A-choo!" from Captain Jones.

"How *could* you sneeze just then. A minute more and it would not have mattered. Now your face will be nothing but a smudge," cried Mrs. Smith, desolated.

"Not much loss to the pic-chaw if it is. But I'm awfully sorry, Mrs. Smith. 'Pon my honour I am. I kept it back till I thought I was going to burst!"

"Won't you sing us one of your amusing songs now, Captain Jones?" said Lady Cecily when they were at last permitted to return to the drawing-room.

"Not unless somebody else'll sing first, so as to put you all into the mood for really good music y'know.—Mrs. Smith—I'm sure you perform——"

"Why yes, Caroline. Pray do. I had almost forgotten you sang."

"Do you know 'Oft in the Stilly Night'? That's a good song now," remarked Sir Peter.

"Yes, or that lovely little Italian song—Gluck wasn't it—that you used to sing—dear me, how many years ago"—said Lady Cecily sentimentally.

Mrs. Smith, who was like other singers in never consenting to sing what her audience asked for, replied that she had completely forgotten "Che Faro," and did not even remember the words of "Oft in the Stilly Night". After a few more excuses, she struck a preliminary chord, and in a well-trained and agreeable if somewhat *passé* voice, began to sing,

On the road to Kew
By the river old and grey
Where in the long ago
We laughed and loitered so,
I met a ghost to-day;
A ghost of low replies
And sweet inscrutable eyes,
Coming up from Richmond,
As you used to do.

"Quite charming. What a pity Johnnie had to go back to Eton. He is so fond of music"—remarked Lady Cecily, thinking this was the end. Mrs. Smith frowned slightly, and began the second verse.

By the river old and grey
The enchanted long ago. . . .

"There's a third verse too. I don't think we need wait," whispered Le Mesurier.

Clytie smiled faintly, and held up her finger to admonish him to silence. Le Mesurier fidgeted, and waited impatiently until the song ended. With indignation hearing Lady Cecily beg her to sing another, he jerked his head towards the garden and muttered—

"I say, Clytie—Let's slip away."

" . . . Not to-night Robin. . . . It's too late," she answered in a low voice.

"Why not to-night? It's our last night——"

"Yes, but—Captain Jones is going to sing. It would look rude."

Her tacit resistance added fuel to his impatience. He felt it impossible to remain sitting in this room with those other people a minute longer. "Nonsense! The idea of Tony expecting us to stop here and listen to him. . . . Viens ma p'tite. Nous allons faire une petite promenade au claire des étoiles."

His fingers closed round her arm, pressing it softly. But she did not move. Her eyes were fixed upon the emerald which she still held between her hands.

"It's past eleven," she murmured. "Aunt Cecily won't——"

"Damn Aunt Cecily! You don't want to come. That's what it is."

Clytie's lips trembled, and a look of bewildered pain came into her eyes. She rose immediately to her feet, and slipped out through the low French window. Le Mesurier took her by the hand and led her across the dewy grass towards the river. From the house behind them they heard Jones' voice jocosely shouting—

When I marry Badelia
Won't there be a spread :
Prawns in aspic jel-ly
Grapes and vermi-celli. . . .

When they returned to the house again, they found everybody moving into the hall on their way to bed. Gavin, who was leaving by an early train, was saying good-bye to Lady Cecily.

"Good-bye, Mr. Buchan. It has been so nice seeing you again quite in the old way. Johnnie enjoyed it particularly. . . . And now I fear this is good-bye for a long time, unless indeed you can look us up in Town before you go."

"Thanks very much. I've enjoyed my visit immensely. . . . But I'm afraid——"

"Well, if you do find time—come in to lunch any day: two o'clock. . . . Otherwise you may miss us, for we have a great deal of shopping to get through before we leave Town."

"Choosing a trousseau is most exhausting, isn't it?" said Mrs. Smith.

They were all standing in a little group at the foot of the stairs.

"Good-bye, Clytie."

"Good-bye."

Their hands met in the conventional hand-shake of farewell. Not so had they parted, five years ago. Gavin added something in an undertone—some wish probably for her happiness in her coming marriage, but the rustle of the elder ladies' skirts as they ascended the stairs, and Lady Cecily's "Clytie, are you coming?" prevented her from hearing it. With a singing in her ears and dull anguish in her heart, she turned away and followed her aunt. . . . Half-way up she hesitated, and looked back at him with a mechanical smile on her lips. Their eyes met. They

seemed to cry out to each other, helpless and despairing. Clytie's hand clutched the bannister. She made a movement as if to return. Then, hearing Lady Cecily once more calling to her, she turned away again, and passed on round the corner of the stairs, and out of Gavin's sight.

5

Watkins was in the kitchen—there was no housekeeper's room at No. 55—enjoying the slight collation which is a necessity to genteel servants between their eight o'clock breakfast and their one o'clock dinner, when the sharp ringing of a bell informed her that her ladyship had returned. Reluctantly she abandoned her third cup of tea, and was leisurely climbing the four flights of stairs, when a second and more peremptory ring obliged her to quicken her steps. Panting, and pathetically holding her side with her hand, she presented herself in her mistress's chamber.

Paying no heed to those symptoms of distress, Lady Cecily curtly begged her to desire Miss Clytie to come to her immediately. Feeling quite unable to climb yet another flight of stairs, Watkins sought out the under-housemaid, and, dispatching her with the message, returned to her ladyship's room, with a somewhat injured countenance.

After a considerable interval Clytie appeared, clad in a kimona, with her short fine hair hanging over her shoulders.

"What is it, Aunt Cecily? I was washing my hair——"

"I wish you to explain something to me please." Lady Cecily spoke in the tone which the French *maman* assumes when she addresses her daughter as "Mademoiselle". "I met Lady Darling this morning in Bond Street, and she came with me to Hanover Square to see your frocks, as she is thinking of getting Aileen's coming-out dress there. She thought them extremely pretty, but—" (parenthesis was so much a second nature with Lady Cecily that, though burning to arrive at the point, she found it impossible not to wander into side issues) "—but she was not quite sure of the opalescent sequins on your wedding dress,—not that she did not think them pretty, but she agreed with me that for a bride. . . . However, that does not matter at this moment. What I wish to ask you about is your *café au lait* tulle, with the yellow roses. Lady Darling thought it *most* striking; and she was looking at it, when suddenly she exclaimed—'Why Lady Cecily, there is a stain on the front of the skirt!'

"My dear

Lady Darling,' I said, 'it is impossible!'—but when I came to examine it, it was quite true. There was a large stain in the very middle of the skirt, exactly as if something had been spilt on it!"

Lady Cecily paused impressively. Watkins looked at Clytie, her eyes like two round O's, and an expression on her face which said "Poor Miss Clytie, won't you catch it". Clytie's eyes were fixed on the carpet. Her cheeks were pink.

"The person who was showing us the dresses at first said it was impossible, it must be some effect of the light; but when I pointed it out to her, she became very confused, and said one of the girls must have dropped something on it in the workroom, and that she would have a new width put in. Her manner seemed to me most suspicious, and when I examined the dress more closely I became convinced that somebody had worn it. I told her I must see Madame Elise at once, at which she became much agitated, imploring me not to complain, as it would cost her her place; and finally she told me the most *incredible* story, that Robert had come and persuaded her to let him take away the dress, as *you* wished to wear it—at a dinner party!—that it had been returned next day, and she had promised to say nothing about it. I felt convinced of course that this story was a fabrication from beginning to end; but the woman seemed so positive that you would confirm what she had said, that I felt obliged to return here and question you before taking further steps."

There was a slight pause before, raising her eyes to her aunt's face, Clytie answered,

"It wasn't her fault at all, Aunt Cecily. Robin made her give him the dress."

"Made her give him the dress! And may I ask for what purpose?"

"I went out to dinner with him—to meet Captain Jones. . . . It was the night you dined at Cousin Caroline's."

"You wore your beautiful trousseau dress! . . . to go out to a party of which I now hear for the first time!—You may go, Watkins. I shall take off my hat myself." (Watkins left the room with extreme reluctance, for she was dying to hear what Miss Clytie had really been doing that evening she came in so late.) "And now Clytie, perhaps you will tell me the truth about this disgraceful business."

"I always tell the truth, Aunt Cecily, and there really wasn't anything disgraceful about it." Clytie spoke with some spirit, but as she described the events of that memorable evening on which

Lady Cecily had dined at the Smiths, it vanished from her voice, which became listless and almost indifferent. She made no attempt either to conceal anything or to excuse herself. When she had finished, Lady Cecily clasped her hands together and sank into a chair.

"You deliberately deceived me," she pronounced tragically.

"Aunt Cecily—I didn't really. I mean, if you had asked me before, I would have told you."

"Pray be silent—I—I really can hardly bring myself to speak to you, Clytie. To have been seen alone, at a place like the Eldorado—not to speak of the theatre—having supper with two young men—all by yourself—in one of your trousseau dresses,—which is completely ruined, the stain will never come out of that delicate colour.—But that is a minor point compared to the other. It is the deceit—the deliberate deceit that I cannot forgive."

"Aunt Cecily, it wasn't like that, truly. When Robin comes back—if you'll ask him, he'll tell you how it happened. We only didn't tell you because we knew you wouldn't let us go."

"I have no wish to hear anything Captain Le Mesurier has to say about it. I am extremely disappointed in him—more than I can say."

"I—I am very sorry, Aunt Cecily.—Please forgive me."

"Out for the evening—like a housemaid with her young man! And if that were all, it would be more than enough. Is it *possible*, Clytie, that you so far forgot yourself as to go to Captain Le Mesurier's rooms, alone with him, in the middle of the night, to change your dress there?"

Lady Cecily's tone could hardly have expressed more had Clytie been guilty of what the French call "*une chute*," and the Bible describes by a plainer name.

"Aunt Cecily—there wasn't anything wrong in that. Robin wasn't there when I was changing. I went into his bedroom."

Lady Cecily cast her eyes up to the ceiling and made a bewildered gesture with her beautiful white hands.

"Is it credible that a girl brought up as you have been? . . . If you had not told me yourself, I could *never* have believed it. All I can say, Clytie, is that I shall be only too thankful to see you safely married, and be no longer responsible for you, for *really*, after what has happened, I shall never feel able to trust you again."

Finding nothing to say in answer to this, Clytie sighed, and stood looking with heavy miserable eyes past her aunt, at the smoke-blurred sunshine on the opposite roofs. .

"I do not say that it was not partly Robert's fault," Lady Cecily began again, in a tone of monotonous severity. "He was undoubtedly greatly to blame. But he probably suggested it without considering the—the extreme impropriety of such a proceeding. I have no doubt that when he thought it over next day, he was very greatly astonished that a modest girl should have consented to such a thing.—It is not wise, I can assure you, Clytie, to lower oneself in the eyes of the man who loves one. I have heard of engagements being broken off for little more than this,—at least——"

"Oh, if he only would"—burst out Clytie in a choking voice.

"Pray restrain yourself, Clytie, and do not be led by temper into saying things which you will regret when you are more yourself."

For answer Clytie burst into a tempest of weeping. Her sobs were so despairing, and her efforts to control them so unavailing, that for some minutes it was impossible for Lady Cecily to understand what she was trying to say. Presently, however, a few broken sentences reached her ears. . . . "I thought I loved him best . . . and now what shall I do? I *can't*. . . . How can I marry him if I don't love him best of all. . . . Oh Aunt Cecily help me . . . I am so very very miserable. O—O—What shall I do?—What shall I do?"

6

Sitting rigidly upright, Lady Cecily waited until Clytie's convulsive sobbing had gradually died away. Then, moistening her dry lips with her tongue, and glancing distractedly towards the door, fearful lest Watkins might have been passing and heard something, she said in a low frightened voice—"I—I really cannot have understood you, Clytie. I cannot believe my ears. Is it possible that you are asking me to help you to—to break off your engagement, only three weeks before the wedding day? . . . May I ask your reason for—for even thinking of doing such an *appalling* thing?"

In an almost inaudible voice, Clytie answered—"But if Robin knew—if you would tell him that—I—I loved somebody else better—perhaps he wouldn't *want* to marry me any more."

"But it is *impossible* you can care for anybody else. When a girl has solemnly promised to become somebody's wife, she has no right even to think of anyone else. This must be pure imagination! It is impossible. You have not met anybody since——"

Lady Cecily's voice stopped abruptly. A sudden suspicion had

flashed through her mind. Her soft horrified face became sharp with indignation. Grasping the arms of her chair, she exclaimed—

“—If the person to whom I believe you are referring, has dared to take advantage of our hospitality to—make secret advances to another man’s betrothed——”

“Aunt Cecily!—He—he never did. He never said a word.—You know he isn’t like that”—burst out Clytie, her face convulsed with anguish and tenderness.

Lady Cecily’s grasp relaxed a little, and the flush of extreme anger faded from her cheeks. With rather an unsuccessful effort to laugh, she observed—

“My dear child. Really you are not yourself to-day. For a moment you made me imagine every kind of thing,—and now it all proves to be nothing at all! Of course we all know that you are very fond of our good Mr. Buchan. It is most natural you should be. I remember you were always his little favourite as a child. But to imagine that he has any other feeling for you . . . when you admit that he has given you no reason whatever for doing so.” . . .

She paused expressively. Clytie’s arm concealed her face, but the part of her cheek which was visible, her neck, her little ear, were all suffused with crimson.

“And to actually suggest that I should tell Robert—your plighted husband, of this—this—I really do not know how to describe it. . . . If *you* can bring yourself to mention such a thing to him, Clytie; pray do so. But I must beg to be excused.”

Clytie uttered not a syllable. Lady Cecily hastened to press home the advantage she had obtained.

“How you can have confused this old childish infatuation for your cousin’s tutor, with the feeling which it is your duty to have for Robert, who will be your husband in a few weeks, I really cannot imagine. I am afraid you cannot be well. . . . If Mr. Buchan had so far forgotten himself as to encourage you in any way,—but you have just admitted to me he did nothing of the sort. I myself noticed that, if anything, he avoided you during his visit. . . . I really blush for you, Clytie!—Fortunately Mr. Buchan need know nothing of this deplorable affair. He will have left England long before your wedding day.”

Perceiving that Clytie’s shoulders were quivering with suppressed sobs, and that the tears were streaming through her fingers, she added in a tone of brisk severity—

“Come, come, Clytie—put all this folly out of your head, and

let us never mention it again. In a month's time it will seem incredible to you that you should ever have imagined it, and your one wish will be never to meet Mr. Buchan again."

"Oh," cried Clytie, raising her head and wringing her hands almost frantically together—"I wish I'd never spoken to you about it. I thought you would help me. Oh—what shall I do? I'd rather die than hurt Robin . . . but . . . if Gavin goes away and leaves me, I . . . I don't feel I can go on living."

"You are a wicked girl—a wicked heartless girl, who never thinks of anybody except herself," exclaimed Lady Cecily springing to her feet and beginning to walk agitatedly up and down the room. "The wickedness—the cruelty of saying such things, when you know how devotedly Robert loves you! To break off your engagement now is impossible, absolutely impossible. The invitations for the wedding have been sent out. The presents are in the house. The trousseau is ready. Your photographs have actually appeared in several papers. It would cause a scandal. Your uncle and I could never hold up our heads again. . . . Oh Clytie—how can you think of treating us in this way, when we have brought you up and loved you like our own daughter. . . . And Robert too. If you were to break it off now, I believe it would break his heart."

Clytie's head had sunk so low that it was pressing against the cold marble mantelpiece.

"And even if you are so lost to everything, that you do not care what pain you inflict on him,—there are other considerations. It is my duty to speak plainly. Do you not realise that what occurred the other evening has hopelessly compromised you? The servant who let you in, the cabman who drove you—*anybody* may have been passing by, and seen you coming out of a young man's rooms in the middle of the night. A girl cannot behave in such a way without risking the loss of her reputation. And when people begin talking, nothing of that sort remains hidden. Let your marriage be broken off, for no apparent reason, at the last moment, and you may be sure it will all come out; and you do not know, dear, but I do, what construction people would put on it." (Clytie threw out her arm with a gesture of passionate indifference.) . . . "And—if you will not listen to me, after all I have done for you—you—you will break my heart as your mother did before you."

Lady Cecily burst into tears, and pressed her handkerchief to her eyes.

"And they'll say—everybody will say that it was only to be

expected of your mother's daughter. The whole dreadful, shameful story will be remembered again."

"My mother? But mother's been dead ever since I was born. I don't know what you mean, Aunt Cecily," said Clytie raising her head.

"Yes, Clytie—your poor wretched mother," said Lady Cecily, crying more and more, so that, with a dull ache in her heart, Clytie noticed that her comely face was twisted and disfigured with emotion. "She is dead, poor Alice. You cannot even remember her. And I always kept it so carefully from you—you need never have known anything about it, but for this—oh dear, oh dear."

"I don't believe it. I don't understand one word of what you're talking about," cried Clytie staring at her with fierce bewildered eyes. "Mother was beautiful, and I know she was good. You can see it from her picture." . . .

"Yes. She was beautiful"—said Lady Cecily. Sitting down on the chair again, she bent her head towards Clytie, and began speaking to her in a low sombre voice. To Lady Cecily, ever inclined to gloss things over and relegate certain subjects to oblivion, it was a dreadful moment; yet she left out no essential of the sad story, not even the abandonment of the first lover for a second, and the final lonely death, deserted by all, in the Italian villa. Upon Clytie, the effect of learning for the first time of her mother's dishonour, was stupefying. When her aunt had done speaking, she remained kneeling beside her in silence, her eyes vacantly following the pattern of the carpet.

"Does Robin know?" she asked at last, without looking up.

"Yes dear. He had heard something of it, and he asked your Uncle Peter to tell him the truth."

There was a long silence. A pigeon flew on to the window sill, but perceiving that there were human beings in the room, flew away again with a flapping of wings. A distant clock chimed the three quarters. A barrel organ began playing in the street below. The sun streamed in through the window, shining upon the ivory and silver and crystal of Lady Cecily's dressing-table.

"Very well, Aunt Cecily. I'll marry Robin," said Clytie suddenly.

"My child. Oh thank God! My dear, dear child."

Weeping with almost hysterical relief Lady Cecily bent forward to embrace and kiss her, and drawing her to her side began softly stroking her cold hand.

"I knew you would, dear Clytie; and some day you will thank me for this. After all, dear, the happiness of others is often the best way of gaining one's own. If we do what is right, not caring

how much it costs us, it must surely be for the best. I know that for a woman to devote her life to making a good man happy, is the highest——”

“All right.—I’ve said I would,” Clytie interrupted her in a harsh breaking voice. Drawing her hand away she got up from the floor, stood for a moment mechanically pushing her hair back from her tear-stained face, and then walked slowly out of the room.

CHAPTER VIII

THE WEDDING EVE

I

A WEEK later the Wyses and Clytie returned to Brocksden, accompanied by a van load of cardboard boxes, great and small. In the unpacking of those boxes all the females of the household were eager to assist, and their contents were speedily arranged in effective groups upon the chairs and tables and great double-bed of the white chamber. Nanna, who in the excitement and importance of those days seemed to have taken a new lease of life, superintended everything with an eagle eye, and did her best to prevent Watkins—whom she still regarded as the “fine Englishy leddysmaid”—from having any say in the matter. After this, in twos and threes the ladies of the neighbourhood began to call; the first to appear being Mrs. Mappett, on which occasion there was much fingering of lingerie and a covert examination of the precise cut and style of the new fashions, for Maisie Mappett was now seventeen, and would require coming-out frocks before you knew where you were. It is to be feared that Nanna found a somewhat malicious satisfaction in displaying Clytie’s finery to Mrs. Mappett, and that it was not without a recollection of the serviceable nainsook and imitation lace of Rose’s trousseau, that she triumphantly pointed out “there was not a bit o’ machining, nor a inch o’ anything but real lace on yin o’ Miss Clytie’s things doon t’ her very semets!” Vainly did Mrs. Mappett endeavour to assume the calm interest of one to whom three hundred guinea trousseaux are no novelties. The set of furs which Robin had given to Clytie wrung from her an involuntary cry of admiration; and after inspecting the evening frocks, and the wedding dress which hung shrouded in a fine sheet in the dressing-room wardrobe, all the spirit departed from her, and she left the room with a heavy step, acutely conscious of being a middle-aged woman in a gown which was four years old.

Never, even in the days when Captain Le Mesurier first came a-wooing, had Lady Cecily seemed more radiantly contented, or more demonstratively affectionate to her niece. She had succeeded in banishing to the back of her mind that agitating hour in her bedroom at South Street: indeed, it had needed only a few days to convince her that what had occurred had been nothing more than an outburst of hysteria, such as any nice-minded girl might indulge in, when the days of her maidenhood were all but numbered. She had carefully refrained from saying anything about it to Sir Peter, however, and by tacit consent the subject was never mentioned between Clytie and herself. The eyes of a mother must have noted and her heart ached over the little outward signs by which Clytie's inward wretchedness was betrayed: the dark lines under her eyes which spoke of troubled nights, the unnatural quietness which alternated with spasmodic efforts to talk and laugh as she used to do, when Rose or any outside person was there. To such tokens of an unceasing inward struggle, her Aunt Cecily was blind. She had done her duty, and Clytie was now doing hers. Beyond this she was resolved to know nothing.

The last weeks glided imperceptibly by. There were farewell calls to be made, and presents to be acknowledged. The tenants presented Sir Peter Wyse's niece with an elaborate gilt and marble clock; the school children gave an electroplate cake basket. The old woman at the lodge made a red satin pin-cushion, and Miss Dodd of the baker's shop a green velvet one. Finally, the house servants joined together in giving her a charming silver rose bowl. In spite of all these hymeneal preparations, the wedding still seemed a long way off; indeed it was not until the arrival of Captain Le Mesurier and Captain Jones upon a certain Monday, that every one seemed on a sudden to realise that the very next Friday was the day itself. After this an atmosphere of flurry and excitement pervaded the house. Watkins began to pack away the trousseau in the fine new trunks: if anybody had neglected their opportunity, it was too late for them to see it now. Mr. Wilson meditated daily before a certain group of his choicest plants, now adding to it, now taking something away which he deemed unworthy of the great occasion. Pretty had long since made up his mind as to the precise arrangement of the presents in the library, and nothing but Sir Peter's indignant protests prevented him from setting to work at once.

Nanna took to spending hours a day in Clytie's bedroom, brushing away imaginary specks of dust, or re-arranging the fast

emptying drawers. At other times she would hover about in the passages, listening with pathetic eagerness for the sound of her bairn's step coming up the stairs.

"Robin"—said Clytie one day, when she had for the third time found Nanna wandering about in the darkness of the upper landing—

"Clytie."

"I want to ask you something. I'm afraid you'll think it ridiculous though. But—*couldn't* I take Nanna to India with me?"

Le Mesurier raised his eyebrows slightly, glanced at Clytie to see if she were joking, then opened his case and carefully selected a cigarette. He and Nanna were on the best of terms; indeed, one day when Lady Cecily had seized Clytie for a consultation as to clothes and packing, he had made his way alone up the backstairs to Nanna's room, where Clytie found him an hour later, his long legs stretched across the patchwork hearth-rug, with the delighted old nurse opposite, telling him interminable stories about the days "when Miss Clytie was a bairn!"—All the same, he was certainly not prepared to take her to India. By Jove, no! A vision passed before his mind's eye of his arrival in cantonments, accompanied by his bride—and Nanna . . . and of the jocose inquiry thereafter of his brother officers—"Hallo Bob, how's your mother-in-law to-day?" To gain time he lit his cigarette with deliberation, and inhaled the smoke three or four times with sensuous enjoyment, before answering—

"I'm afraid not, Clytie. She's too old."

"She's very old to be left behind," said Clytie wistfully.

"She'll stay on here, won't she?"

"Aunt Cecily's asked her to. But she doesn't like the idea. She says what will there be for her to do without even my stockings to darn. She talks of going to her nephew—but I know she won't get on with his wife. And she'll be so lonely——"

"Hasn't she any money of her own?"

"Oh yes, she's saved lots. Nearly five hundred pounds I believe. But she doesn't like spending it one bit. She wants to keep it all and leave it to me."

There was a suspicious quaver in Clytie's voice.

"She's really a splendid traveller. And you don't know how useful she'd be, mending your socks and the linen and things."

Le Mesurier continued to smoke in a meditative silence for some minutes.

"I tell you what, Clytie," he said at last, "she can go to my uncle's. There'd be things for her to do there all right. His

socks are sure to want mending or something. I'll fix it up with him when he comes on Thursday. . . . We couldn't take her out with us you know, darling. We may be sent anywhere, and there mightn't even be room for her in the bungalow. Later on, perhaps—if you——" His eye sought for and met Clytie's. "—Well, if there was a job going in our house for which she was the very thing, then we could have her out you know. I'll tell her that, if you like. It'll buck her up. . . . Is that all right?"

Clytie took his hand between her own and gently pressed it.

"After all, you can't always have your nurse with you. Big girls don't. I'm afraid you'll have to get used to the idea of coming away with me alone."

"Yes, Robin."

"But you'd like to defer the evil day, wouldn't you? Well, look here—we'll strike a bargain. If you don't cry on Friday—all Friday mind you, and not *one* tear!—Nanna can join us at Standalone on Monday. Then she'll have a week more of you before we go to Paris.—But perhaps you'd like her to come to Paris with us too?"

At the idea of Nanna on a Parisian honeymoon, Clytie could not help laughing.

"That's right. Try to look at the bright side of things," said Robin.

"I'll go and tell Nanna she's coming to Standalone," she cried springing to her feet. "It'll make *all* the difference to her, knowing that."

Half-way across the room she hesitated, came back to him, and put her arms round his neck.

"Thank you, Robin Adair," she said in a low voice.

"Tu es contente?—Eh bien?" he murmured, pouting out his lips. She kissed him quickly, and endeavoured to escape. He held her for a moment, then let her go.

When she had left him, Le Mesurier sat staring thoughtfully in front of him, with a slight frown puckering his forehead. . . . What was the matter with Clytie? *Was* there anything the matter with her? Yes. There was. He had noticed the difference the day he arrived—no, before that really. He had noticed it when he came up to London to see them off. . . . What was it then? Had anybody been telling her things and frightening her?—or could it be that, as the wedding day approached, she began to have doubts about marrying *him*.—He could not believe it was that. There was an exquisite timidity in her manner towards him, a silently eager perception of his wishes, and desire

to anticipate them. . . . No. She loved him all right. And yet, things had been different in London. They had kissed. They had quarrelled. He had been able to say very nearly all he was feeling to her, without being afraid of frightening or bewildering her. They had seemed so near together then. . . . And now, he had again to walk as warily as in the earliest days of their wooing. She had taken to escaping from him, and wandering out into the woods by herself. She seemed afraid to meet his eye! . . . A flush of indignation slowly rose in his cheeks.—Why was she treating him like this? Did she not know that he was almost sick with longing for her! . . . But no. He was unjust. She could not help it—that was the truth of the matter. This was the instinctive withdrawal behind its barriers of her innocent soul, afraid even of the lover as the hour of surrender approached.—What would she look like, his little Clytie, when he had her all to himself in the railway carriage after the wedding. He could see her now, looking away out of the window, her face changing from pale to rosy, afraid to look at him or speak to him, yet even more afraid of silence. How could he manage to calm her fears, to reassure her, and make her see that there was nothing to be afraid of,—only Robin Adair and herself, released at last from the maddening interference of Aunt Cecily, going off to Standalone together—to be happy.

“It’ll be all right on the night——” he quoted aloud from the Pantomime Rehearsal, a farce in which he delighted. Smiling at his own *double entendre*, he got up and walked from the room in search of Clytie.

As he went along the upper landing, the door of the white chamber stood wide open. Glancing in, he saw that Clytie’s trousseau had vanished. An Irish crochet coverlet was spread on the bed; there were flowers on the dressing-table, and pins in the pin-cushion. The windows were open, and the white damask curtains billowed and rustled in the gentle breeze. Farther down the passage a sound of polishing of furniture and crackling of maids’ print skirts issued forth from the blue room. He met Watkins with a bowl of roses in her hands, and then the head housemaid, her arms filled with snowy sheets. By Jove! It was Wednesday already. The wedding guests would be coming to-morrow. And the day after—was the day that would make Clytie his.—“She’s mine now,” something inside him said. Insistently, savagely almost, he repeated it, as he strolled up the winding stone stair which led to the attics—“Mine—mine. Gare qui la touche!” At that moment

the instincts of the primitive male seemed to take possession of him, crushing the inward misgiving which all his silent arguments had not quite allayed, rousing in him atavic memories of the days when the bridegroom captured his bride by force, and carried her before him on his saddle, willy nilly, to the nuptial chamber.

Nanna's room was at the end of the passage. The door was ajar. Voices were talking within. He paused a moment before knocking, and heard the old nurse saying in a voice tremulous with eagerness, and yet solemn too—

"An' gin the Lord shud bless ye wi' a bairn, Miss Clytie,—an wha more likely t' hae yin than yoursel that's young an' strong—ye'll just hae t' send me wurrd in gude time, and I'll be wi' ye in Injie afore ye expeck me. A'm no sae auld yet that I wud lat ony ither body be nurrse tae your weans, but masel."

2

As it was a perfect afternoon, tea had been spread under the cedar tree on the terrace. Lady Cecily was talking graciously to Robin's uncle, Lord Braeburn, a short stiff old bachelor, on whose red and wrinkled face a certain queer likeness to his nephew might be discerned. Lord Braeburn had given an extremely handsome present to the bride, and he could not help feeling that this should have been enough, without his being expected to leave his comfortable home and stay in a strange house for that most tiresome of functions, a wedding. He had decided to leave next day whenever the business was over; and he was resolved to do so, even if it meant motoring half the way in the dark. He thought Clytie plainer than her modest two hundred pounds a year justified.—Bob's own mother had not been much to look at, but then *she* had brought with her a dot of thirty thousand pounds. However, she seemed a quiet well-bred girl, and likely to produce an heir for Braeburn, which was the main thing.

Meantime Lady Cecily's sentimental references to the morrow, and prophecies that she hardly knew how she could bear to lose Clytie—when it was obvious that the good was overjoyed at her making so excellent a marriage boring him very much. Seeing Pretty approaching with upon a silver salver, he said with alacrity—"Pray letters, Lady Cecily. I won't disturb you"—and towards the tennis court, pulling a fat leather of his pocket.

Robin and Clytie were playing against a couple of Le Mesurier cousins; while, on the grass bank above the court, Jones sat at the feet of Clytie's second cousin, Lady Mary Bonkle, whom Lady Cecily had insisted upon inviting to be bridesmaid, although Clytie had only met her two or three times, in Town. In close proximity to them squatted Roly and Poppet Mappett, who had come over to see the presents, as, to their mamma's silent indignation, Lady Cecily had only invited the four elder children to the wedding next day.

"And where are they going for their honeymoon, Captain Jones, or has that to be kept a secret?" asked Lady Mary.

"Not from me—rather not. You don't seem to realise what an important fellow the best man is! They're going to the Highlands first—and then on to Paris—gay Paree you know, that's the place for a honeymoon! By Jove! I wish I was goin' there too—eh what."

"I'm afraid Captain Le Mesurier wouldn't be very pleased to see you," said Lady Mary; then she blushed and hoped she had not said anything improper. Jones, noticing the blush, thought to himself what a dear little thing she was.

"Rose went for her honeymoon to Dunbar. And she took Arthur with her"—observed Roly Mappett.

"Yes, an' she w-wouldn't let us come too, though we w-wanted to most dreadfully 'cos of the sand castles," chimed in Poppet.

"What bores kids can be!" thought Jones, adding aloud in a jocular tone—"Now then young 'uns, aren't you thinkin' of goin' to the garden to see if I've left you any strawberries—eh what?"

"No thank you. We aren't allowed to eat strawberries between meals 'cos they might upset us," answered Roly rather snubbingly.

Sir Peter approached, looking dejected, with two elderly ladies of the MacLeod connection in tow. He had been showing them round the garden, and they were complimenting him on the roses. Johnnie too put in an appearance for the first time that afternoon; in fact the whole house-party gathered together to watch the tennis, which was approaching an exciting finish.

"Play up now, Clytie. It'll never do for you to be beaten to-day,"
 1 Johnnie.

Cecily, feeling this encouragement of the home side to be the thing, called out—"Well played, Miss Le Mesurier,"
 at young lady had just served a double.

' been playing very badly in the earlier part of the
 Robin's efforts had not prevented their losing the
 ous that he was vexed, although he said nothing,

she played worse than ever after this, abandoning her usual free hard hitting game, and trying desperately to play steadily. The other side had got the first four games, and it looked ominously like being a love sett. Clytie served a double, and tears came into her eyes.

"What does it matter, sweetheart. Don't worry. I don't care a damn if we're beaten or not"—whispered Robin, coming back from the net to give her a ball. His gentle words, coming just when she had believed he was quite disgusted with her, put fresh heart into Clytie. From that moment she played better, and they began to pull up, game by game, until they were four all.

"Dear me! Times have changed indeed. To think of getting excited over a game of tennis on one's wedding eve," said one of the ladies, with a sigh for the romantic white-muslin-clad unathletic days of her own youth.

Lord Braeburn, who disliked sentimentality, gave a little snort of disagreement.

"As for your garden, Lady Cecily, I never saw such a dream of beauty," said the younger of the two ladies, who were sisters.

"The dew is beginning to fall, Cecily. You had better come in," said Sir Peter.

"Well, perhaps—Mrs. Cochrane, Miss Cameron, shall we?—Oh, Clytie, by the by, cousin Caroline sends you the kindest messages, and the snap-shots too. I will leave the letter on the seat for you to read."

Clytie, in the middle of a desperate rally, frowned angrily, and returned a weak shot which Mr. Le Mesurier promptly smashed.

"Keep the ball away from him, Clytie. No good putting 'em into his racquet," exclaimed Robin.

"Aunt Cecily spoke to me——"

"Never mind. You're playing jolly well now. Just one game more. If only I can get in my first service."

He did, and they won the sett, 6—4. The light was going, and the players, heated with their exertions, sank down on the grass.

"The way Miss MacLeod kept pegging them into Alice's back hand at the end. That was what did the trick."

"You should never run round a ball, Alice. You'll never get good back hand drive if you do."

"It wasn't that, Bob. It was Jack bounding about in ' me put me off."

Lady Mary's voice was heard saying enthusiastically the wedding will be so *pretty* if you and Captain Le ' your uniforms"—at which everybody laughed.

Poppet Mappett repeated for the third time, with a perceptible whine in her voice, "You praw-mised to show me your weddin' dress".

"All right, Poppet. You shall see it. I'll take you in a minute—but don't sit on the wet grass," said Clytie, drawing the fat little girl on to her knee.

Le Mesurier glanced at the child with a slight frown, and felt glad when she very soon wriggled on to her feet and ran to join Roly, who was picking up fir cones. In his present mood, to see Clytie fondle any creature, even the old retriever, was disagreeable to him. Although before the others his face was as composed as usual, he felt so curiously restless, he found it impossible to sit still.

"You've got no coat, Clytie. You mustn't sit here"—he said; adding in a whisper as she rose obediently to her feet—"Incorrigible! Do you ever remember it? Come a turn round the garden."

"No time. I must go and change. Besides I 'prawmised' to show Poppet my wedding dress. Come along, Poppet. Yes—bring your cones if you like."

"Most unattractive child," muttered Le Mesurier as the little Mappett approached.

The coffee-coloured tulle with its bunch of yellow roses had long since been laid out on Clytie's bed, but Nanna was moving about the room with the restlessness of over excited old age. At the sight of Clytie her head shook, and she began to shed tears.

"Aw ma lamb, t' think it's the morn an' a'. T' think o't," she quavered.

"I say, Ninny—*do* you mind fetching my wedding dress from the other room—just to show Poppet. I promised her."

Nanna's emotion was checked immediately.—"Eh peety me! Are ye wantin' me t' uncover it again, an' it hung away in it's shetts an' tishy paper. What for can ye no lat it be till the morn? Ye'll hae a' the freshness oot o't if ye trash it aboot this gate." In her old scolding voice with which she was wont to address every child except Clytie, she added—"As for you, Miss Pawpet, there's nurse below been speerin' for you this half 'oor back. There'll be paddy-whacks for somebody the nicht I'm thinkin'." However,

she bled away and disappeared across the passage.

"You're scolded for stopping late, Poppet, you can say I kept Clytie kicking off her tennis shoes.

eyes grew round with disapproval.

"ay, that, 'cos—it isn't true," she remarked with con-

"It *is* true"—began Clytie indignantly, but at that moment somebody entered the room without knocking.

"It's me," explained Roly somewhat unnecessarily. "The man you're going to marry to-morrow told me to give you this. You left it lying on the seat." He held out a letter to her. "Do you know—he's got a *real* sword. He told me so."

Clytie slipped her fingers carelessly into the open envelope, and a couple of photographs fluttered to the ground. Roly, who was well brought up, politely picked them up for her, and continued to give her further information as to Le Mesurier's warlike possessions.

"And he's got a gun too. Not just a double gun like my father, but a real bullet gun what would shoot a tiger."

Nanna, returning with the wedding dress reverently swathed in a fine sheet, found Clytie leaning against the dressing-table staring at something in her hand.

"D'ye ken what time it's? Half-past seven an' more, an' you wi' every stitch ye've on t' change, and your hair to do!—And Master Roly here too I declare! What next? Here's the goon, Miss Poppet, an'—keep your fingers off it child!"

Poppet reluctantly drew back her small grubby hand, stared at the shimmering creamy garment with round eyes, and at last loyally declared—"Rose's was prettier".

Nanna vented her feelings in a sniff of extreme scorn.

"M-phm. A daresay it was. An' now ye've seen it, awa' ye gang the twa o' ye. We've nae time tae be tribbled wi' bairns the noo."

In spite of Roly's dignified protest—"It's very rude to go away without saying good-bye," she hustled them out of the room, and returning exclaimed shrilly to find Clytie still in the same attitude.

"Pit that doon this *meenut* an' dress yoursel'. It would never do for ye to be late the nicht ye ken. . . . But what ails ye bairn? Ye look uncae gash, hinny! Sit ye doon an' I'll fetch ye a drop o' brandy."

As she was hurrying from the room, Clytie's voice recalled her.

"Come back, Ninny. It's nothing. I'm just tired—horribly tired."

She leant back in the arm-chair with her eyes closed, Nanna, full of vocal indignation at the folly of playing ter the sun on such an afternoon, undid and brushed her hair, took off her stockings. Presently she rose languidly to and began to undress.

"The peety o't," grumbled Nanna bending

the scattered garments. "Furrst ye was as red as a Bubbly Jock, playin' i' the sun wi' naethin' on your heed, an' noo ye're as pale as tho ye'd seen a ghaist."

"I—have seen a ghost," said Clytie with a rather wild laugh.

Nanna picked up the snapshot, and put on her spectacles to look at it.

"There's you and her leddyship, an' the captin' aside ye. An' yon'll be Captin' Jones. M-phm. A'm no sayin' but he dis luke unco like a ghaist too. He'll must hae moved when he was bein' taken."

3

Everybody had been waiting in the drawing-room at least ten minutes, and yet Clytie had not appeared. The Homes indeed, having arrived five minutes too early, had been sitting there for a quarter of an hour. (What a pang it had been to Mrs. Mappett to learn that the Homes were invited on this interesting occasion, while she and the Colonel were not: it was a sad thing indeed when a grand marriage made people drop their old friends!) The conversation was jerky and lacking in conviction. As a race we converse with difficulty when we are waiting to be fed. Even Lady Ord in her brilliant emerald dress, felt it hardly worth while to start a flirtation with Captain Jones, when dinner might be announced any moment. Gloomy, gloomier, gloomiest would be an apt description of the expression on the countenances of Sir Peter, Sir Edward Ord, and Lord Braeburn, as the minutes crawled by. And yet, the eminently practical suggestion of Johnnie—"Don't you think, mother, we'd better go in without Clytie?" merely raised a pitying smile on the faces of the ladies.

At last the covert glance of many eyes towards the door was rewarded. The handle turned: it opened, and Clytie came in ickly. Finding all eyes fixed upon her, she laughed nervously murmured "I'm so sorry—I'm afraid I'm dreadfully late!" Hmph! Perhaps we shall get dinner now," said Sir Edward to himself.

"As long as you don't do it to-morrow, we shall forgive you to-night," said Lady Ord—and began telling Captain Jones how ickly late she had been for her wedding, and what a scowl he had given her when she came into church. With Clytie's nce a buzz of relieved conversation had arisen.

"Things women," reflected Lord Braeburn, his deep-set istic blue eyes scanning Clytie who was standing in M's Home, who was admiring her dress. "—Devote

all their energies to catching a man—and when they've got him, they wish they hadn't! . . . She's better looking than I thought though—quite a look of the thoroughbred about her. . . . Evidently in a blue funk though. Bob will have his work cut out for him to-morrow."

Noticing his nephew move across the room until he stood beside Clytie, he thought, with a gleam of pride in his eyes—"Well, she's a lucky wench. There aren't many like him."

"I shouldn't have let you play that last sett of tennis. It has tired you," said Le Mesurier looking calmly down at Clytie, and offering her his arm to lead her into dinner.

They sat together at one end of the table, with Lord Braeburn on her other side. The dinner was excellent, and Sir Peter had brought out his choicest wines, to the satisfaction of the older gentlemen. It was an animated meal, and amid the general buzz of conversation and laughter Clytie's silence passed unnoticed, except by Robin.

"You must eat something"—he said to her firmly, half-way through the meal.

She gave a little start, and looked at him as if unable to understand what he had said.

"Pretty, bring back that dish, will you. Now Clytie, take some of that."

She tried to obey him, but the chicken cream tasted like putty in her mouth, and her throat seemed to refuse to swallow. Glancing apprehensively at him, she laid down her fork.

"Have some more champagne. Then you'll be able to manage it," said that gentle inexorable voice beside her.

Dessert was put on the table. Healths were drunk, and speeches were made, but not by Le Mesurier, who was apparently reserving his eloquence for the morrow. After dinner Johnnie and Captain Jones sang comic songs to the diversion of the company; indeed it was a quarter to eleven when Sir Edward, coming up behind his wife, said in an indignant whisper—"They don't want us to stay all night, Gladys!"

Amid the general move, Le Mesurier's eyes imperiously summoned Clytie. They moved together into the back drawing-room.

"Clytie—you must go to bed. Don't stop to say good night to anyone. Just slip away. Good night my darling."

He drew her to him and gently kissed her hair.

"—I expect to find you looking quite different to-morrow, do you hear?"

Her eyes were fixed on the ground. After a moment's silence he pinched her cheek, and murmured—"Silly little girl. What's she afraid of?"

His lips smiled ironically, but there was infinite tenderness in his eyes. He took her hands. "Well, I must be off I suppose," he said. "The motor's here. Mustn't keep Warburton waiting. . . . Aren't you going to say good night to me, Clytie?"

Her hands suddenly clung to his. "Don't leave me Robin—d-don't go away and leave me!" she murmured. Her eyes, bewildered and terrified like those of a lost child, were fixed upon him.

"I'm being turned out, sweetheart. It's not my doing. . . . Come, Clytie. Let me see you going up to bed, and then I'll be off."

Her clinging hands relaxed. She moved mechanically by his side towards the drawing-room door. Everybody had left it, and gone into the hall.

Le Mesurier stood looking at her in silence with smiling passionate eyes.

"Demain soir—je ne te quitterai plus," he whispered, and kissed her on the lips.

The next moment he was strolling into the hall, with an expression of cool imperturbability on his face.

"Well, if your inhospitable decision holds good, Lady Cecily, I suppose I must be off."

"My dear Robert—no inhospitality I assure you. It is considered the most unlucky thing for a bridegroom to——"

"I'm dreadfully offended at your not coming to the castle," broke in Lady Ord.

Le Mesurier turned to her with an ironic smile.

"If her ladyship had really wished to have me, she should have been less witty about the other poor devils who stayed with her on such occasions," he remarked in an undertone.

Lady Ord blushed and laughed.

"You're different. I wouldn't have *dared* to make fun of you," she protested.

Meantime Pretty, his face red with benevolent satisfaction, tenderly helped the captain into his coat. The chauffeur started the engine. Jones shouted jocosely "All aboard," and amid a chorus of good nights, the motor rolled away into the darkness.

4

Nanna was waiting to help Clytie to undress and tuck her up for the last time in her little bed. As a rule she would have been full of inquiries as to the events of the "pairty," but to-night her old heart was too full of joy and sorrow for her to speak. In silence she unfastened the pretty frock, drew the pins out of the coils of red hair, and began brushing it with a gentle soothing movement. After a few minutes Clytie put up her hand to stop her.

"That's enough, Ninny. I'll plait it myself. Go to bed now. It's nearly twelve. You shouldn't have waited up for me."

The old servant looked in protest at those words.

"It'll no tak me a meenut. A'll see ye safe in your bed afore I go."

"No, Ninny—do go. I'm ready really. I'd rather you went."

"A doot the excitement o' the denner's gien ye a sair heed. Wull I warm ye a drop o' milk? It's a grand thing t' make ye sleep, taken the last thing at nicht."

"No thank you. I don't want it. I—I'm awfully sleepy, but I must say my prayers. . . . Good-night, Ninny."

With an unresponsive stillness which was very unlike her, she submitted to her old nurse's embrace.

"Bless ye ma darling. Sleep soond; but gin ye shud want onything in the nicht jist ring your bell an' I'll be doon' in a meenut. I'm a fine light sleeper."

She bent stiffly to pick up the tulle dress from the sofa, folded it over her arm, and reluctantly turned to go. At the door she paused and said timidly—

"—A suppose ye wudna care for me tae sleep aside ye the nicht, wud ye hinny? I could lie fine on the sofy."

"No, no, you couldn't sleep there. Oh, *leave* me alone now," cried Clytie in a high fretful voice; and when the door was shut she remained standing in the middle of the floor, glancing with wide fixed eyes around her as if fearful that somebody was still watching her. At last she walked slowly to the dressing-table, opened the drawer, took something out of it, and sitting down on the chair fixed her eyes upon it.

CHAPTER IX

THE WEDDING DAY

I can die, but canna part
My bonnie dearie—O.

—ROBERT BURNS

I

IT was long after midnight. The house had gradually sunk into a complete silence. Everybody was abed and asleep. Through the open window a moonbeam had stolen in and lay like a streak of silver on the carpet. Except for the mournful hooting of an owlet in the fir wood, the whole country-side was still. A profound peace had settled upon the world.

And yet, before many hours had gone, the sun would rise again. Everybody would waken up. The village children would be out early to gather flowers to scatter before the bride. The gardeners would be busy decking the triumphal arch over the avenue gate. The bridesmaids would be longing for the hour to come when they might put on their beflowered muslin frocks. The coachman would put nosegays in his carriage lamps, and a favour in his buttonhole. Then the bells would begin to tumble over each other in the church tower, and Robin, waiting there, would know that his bride was coming. . . . It was but a short way from the churchyard gate to the altar. It would take only a few minutes . . . and then it would be done, never to be undone again, never, never. . . . To-morrow all those things would inevitably happen.

But it was still to-night, and that—was Gavin's face. Yes. There he was standing alone at the back, in his old, old dress suit, while she, Clytie, sat in the very front, with those others beside her. And she had let them seat her apart from him, in the place of honour—"Quite a bridal group," Cousin Caroline had called it—with Robin and Captain Jones one on each side of her, and Gavin right behind everybody, like some one who had got into the picture by mistake. Tears blinded her eyes. She brushed them angrily away, and bent over the photograph again.

The experiment with flashlight had not been quite successful. Some of the figures were startlingly clear, but others, and among them Gavin, were cloudy and indistinct. Was it imagination then, or was it really there—that look in his eyes, that look which he had given her after they had said good-bye . . . before all the other people they had said good-bye, he and she . . . that look which she had tried to forget, and which this little bit of paper had caught, and perpetuated, and hurried in the shrieking express from London to Scotland to drive her to despair upon the night before her wedding day.

Clytie gasped for breath. Great drops of sweat stood upon her forehead. With a shaking hand she turned up the lamp so that it flared, blackening the funnel. *Now* she could see things as they really were. It had been that dim light, making her imagine . . . Those eyes were quietly indifferent—nothing more. What right had she to believe he still cared? He had said nothing. . . . Only that one look. . . . What was a look after all?

A distant clock struck, echoing through the night air—One—Two. The clock was in the steeple of a church which was all decked with flowers within. Somebody was going to be married in that church to-morrow. *To-morrow?* No, it was *to-day!* She, Clytie, was going to be married there to-day, married to Robin—to Robin, who loved and trusted her. . . . He might be cold to others, but never to her . . . and he had never forced her will when she accepted him. He was too proud, and he loved her too much for that. . . . It had never been his fault—never for a moment. He had come all this way to be married to her. . . . And everybody knew, all the regiment—everybody . . . Robin!—If she—No, it was impossible. Never could she wrong and humiliate him so utterly. To-morrow, it must be—it must be.

—But, oh God! It was Gavin—just Gavin that she loved—Gavin was herself. She was his. Gavin—Gavin. There had never been anyone else, nobody else in the world for her but him. . . . And if she felt like this—it was a sin—a sin to be married to Robin to-morrow. Because—O! O! marriage meant other things. How could she lie in Robin's arms, with her heart breaking for somebody else?

Scarcely knowing what she was doing, she wound her hands into her hair and began hurrying wildly up and down the room.

Suddenly she heard a slow heavy step coming down the back stairs. In terror she blew out the lamp, flung herself into bed, and buried her face in the pillow. The boards in the passage

creaked. There was a fumbling at the handle of the door: then it opened cautiously, and a wrinkled yellow face surmounted by a strange night-cap peered into the room.

"A thoct I hearrd ye movin' aboot. . . . Are ye sleepin' ma doo?" a quavering voice murmured. Clytie lay motionless with her eyes tightly shut.

"Aye—she's sleepin'," said Nanna at last. Shading the candle with her hand so that the light should not fall on the bed, she went out, cautiously shutting the door behind her. Her slipped feet went away down the passage and up the stairs, and then there was silence. It was quite dark in the room now. The moon was no longer shining in through the window. The dimity curtains of the little white bed seemed to suffocate Clytie. She must have air. Very quietly, lest Nanna should hear her and return, she slipped out of bed, and stole across to the window.

Dear God! How quiet, how beautiful it was outside. The moon now riding high, flooded the lawns and woods with her silver light. The cedar tree stood out like bronze against the night sky. The flowers on the terrace seemed to lie sleeping in the moonlight. Every daisy shone like silver in the green grass. Perhaps there was a rabbit caught in a trap in the wood, tearing itself to pieces in its efforts to get free—but what did the flowers care? The peace of the sleeping world seemed unbroken. The moon shone on radiant and serene.

Clasping her hands together, she tried to pray—"Oh Heavenly Father, Oh God, have mercy. Help me. Have pity on me!" . . . What deep blue shadows there were under the trees—like cool blue water. She would go downstairs and out of the house, and walk with bare feet on the cold dewy grass, and lie down in the heart of the wood . . . as she and Robin had lain, that day, among the blue-bells at Kew. . . . O—O—O—Gavin! Gavin!

The clock struck four. Already along the eastern horizon lay a band of pale grey light which was gradually spreading up the sky. One by one the stars began to put out their lights. The hours were flying!—God was driving them along with a whip! Clasping her hands before her eyes to shut out the sight of approaching day, she burst into a wild despairing weeping. For there was nothing to be done—nothing, nothing—because Robin loved her.

She had sunk down upon the floor, and lay there crying pitifully and helplessly. Those unrestrained tears soothed and exhausted her. She pressed her face against the carpet, and wondered dully

if all might not yet be well. Jesus might help her if she prayed to Him again. He had done greater miracles before—the leper man, and Lazarus, and . . . she was too tired to remember any more. If He liked he could make it all as if it had not been. . . . No, no. Even He couldn't do that. *He* had prayed to God in the garden of Gethsemane—but next day He had gone down the hill to be crucified. . . . Perhaps He would let her die before to-morrow came! . . . Oh—how cruel she was even to think of praying for that, when Robin was waiting for her. . . . To be true to Robin—not to forget, *never*—but to be true to Robin, that was the only thing that mattered now. She would pray for nothing else—only to be true.

Stiffly, and shivering with cold in her thin nightgown, she rose to a kneeling attitude. . . . The carpet was so hard. It cut into her knees, and she felt sick. She would go over to the bed and lie down for a minute, just one minute, because she was so very tired.

So the wet lashes sank over the wild brown eyes. The lines of anguish round the mouth relaxed. The pale cheeks, which the tears had so maltreated, became softly flushed. And Clytie slept.

Clytie woke.

The sun was pouring in through the open window. The birds were singing in the shrubbery. A pleasant sound of life and bustle filled the house, and people stood by her bed and smiled at her.

"Come, Clytie—you must waken up now and have your breakfast. It is actually past ten. We let you sleep as long as we could, for you were so tired last night."

It was her aunt's voice. She bent down and kissed her, then stood aside to let Nanna come forward with the breakfast tray. In the background Watkins, her face one excited grin, was arranging a pile of snowy lingerie on a chair.

Clytie sat up, put her hand to her eyes as if the light hurt her, then taking it away, stared at them in a dazed way.

"What day is it?" she asked suddenly.

Lady Cecily and the two servants began to laugh. "What day? Did she speer what day it's!" cried Nanna, and Lady Cecily exclaimed—"Oh you foolish child. You are half-asleep still. What *day should* it be but your wedding day, Clytie."

So to-morrow had come.

Nanna set down the tray on a small table by the bed, and put another pillow behind Clytie's shoulders. Lady Cecily poured out her coffee, and sat down on the edge of the bed.

"Mary Bonkyl and Miss Le Mesurier have been to the church already, and they say it is quite lovely. Wilson has done the pulpit with maidenhair and roses, and the altar rails are one mass of Malmaison carnations."

"How nice," said Clytie.

"And Rose Milbanke is here already. She drove over after breakfast, but I would not let her come up until you were awake. Watkins, you might ask Mrs. Milbanke to come up now.—Poor Rose. It is hard on her not to be at the wedding, but it is only natural that she should not care to be seen by everybody, as she shows so much already, and they have all known her as a girl."

"Very natural," assented Clytie raising a piece of toast to her lips and putting it down again untasted. She must have drunk the coffee, for her cup was empty. She poured herself out some more. Then Rose Milbanke came into the room, with her gentle familiar face and pathetically altered, clumsy figure and heavy step. She too kissed Clytie with a lingering tender kiss, and smiled, and said what a perfect day it was, the very kind of day one would have wished it to be.

"And how are you, dear Rose? We were so distressed you were not well enough, that day, to come and see the trousseau," said Lady Cecily.

"I am very well really, thank you, Lady Cecily," said Rose blushing a little; "I was just. . . . It was nothing. I am quite all right again, thank you. Only I have to take care." . . . For the fraction of a second a look of distress, almost of fear shadowed her eyes. Turning quickly towards Clytie, she said—"But I felt I must come and help you to dress to-day, Clytie. And when you set off, I shall drive quietly back to the rectory. I shall be standing there, behind the privet hedge, to see you when you come out of church. And if I am not too tired, I shall slip up into the gallery for the service. It is so funny to think of it. I have never been at a wedding in my life—except at my own."

"Clytie has not been long in following your good example, has she Rose?" remarked Lady Cecily with a triumphant smile.

There was a knock at the door, and in came Lady Mary, and Alice Le Mesurier, a little shy lest they should be intruding, but very eager to show their bridesmaids' presents

which had just arrived. "Look, Clytie—Lady Cecily, aren't they too sweet? Isn't it *too* kind of Captain Le Mesurier to give us such lovely little pendants. Yes, pink topazes. They exactly match the blush roses on our bonnets."

"I've turned on your bath, Miss Clytie—an' there's nobody in the passage at present," whispered Watkins. Bending to remove the tray, she noticed with a little start that nothing had been eaten; but as her ladyship had apparently not observed it, it was hardly her place to comment on it. Nanna, who would have had no such scruple, had left the room on some mysterious errand.

The window of the bath-room was open, and sparrows were twittering in the ivy which peeped in. In a kind of dream, Clytie took off her nightgown, and lay down in the warm water which was scented with eau-de-Cologne, Nanna having just emptied half a bottle of Lady Cecily's into it. She might have lain there for ever, but a voice calling that it was twenty minutes to eleven, roused her. She dried herself and put on the soft new cambric garments, without noticing them. Then she returned to her bedroom to find them in a flutter of excitement.

"Look! Wilson has sent up your bouquet. Isn't it a dream—those lovely little Scotch roses, and the myrtle——"

"Yes, and the white heather—real white heather—so lucky."

"You must give us all bits of it to keep——"

"If I might have a bit of the myrtle, Clytie? Later on, I would strike it, and perhaps we might have a bush of it in the rectory garden."

"I must say Wilson has done it very nicely—quite like a good shop," said Lady Cecily.

Clytie took the flowers in her hand, and smelt their sweetness, and turned them this way and that, trying to think of something to say which would sound right. No words came to her however, so she laid them gently down on the dressing-table, and then there was a slight pause. What was to be done now? It was still too soon to dress for the wedding, and yet before very long it would be time to do so.

"Couldn't Clytie—Lady Cecily—come out for a little into the garden?" said Rose. "It must be so lovely to-day, and it is not eleven yet."

"Well—if it was only for ten minutes—it might do her good, for she is rather pale. Still, I hardly think——"

"I could dress your ladyship, while Miss Clytie was out," put in Watkins.

LOVE IN A MIST

Her timely suggestion settled the matter. Nanna, with a sour face, for she considered she was being robbed of her last half-hour with her bairn, got out Clytie's everyday green gingham, and a shady hat. She and Rose went down the back stairs and out on to the terrace by the side door. After a moment's hesitation the other girls followed them, attracted by the bride as the needle is drawn by the magnet.

"How can they keep so close to us? Surely they must know we are old friends and would like to be alone," thought Rose with as much acerbity as her nature was capable of.

In a little group of four they sauntered round the garden, and out at the far end, into the cypress walk. Miss Le Mesurier kept up a flow of lively talk for some time—wondered what Bob was doing this morning, admired the roses, and declared the bridesmaids' dresses were too quaint and charming for words. Lady Mary, while appearing to listen, walked with her eyes fixed upon Clytie. What did it feel like, the day one was going to be married? And going away afterwards with a man she hardly knew—how strange it must feel. Was Clytie frightened at being married? She longed to question her on those points, but was far too well bred to do so. Presently the silence of the couple in front infected even Alice Le Mesurier, whose chatter gradually died away.

"She really is quite a decent-looking girl, though she isn't exactly pretty. Something very Highland about her. She should look jolly well with that gorgeous old lace veil over her red hair. All the same she's not one bit like what I'd have expected Bob to admire," she thought, looking critically at her future cousin.

"I expect Clytie is feeling very shy at the idea of being stared at by so many people. I know I should. . . . And yet how *wonderful* it all is. I wonder—if I—shall ever". . . mused Lady Mary.

"Clytie is *very* quiet—quieter than I've ever seen her," thought Rose. "Can it be?—Oh I *hope* that seeing me like this isn't frightening her at the idea of going through it herself. And yet, she must want to have a baby. Everybody does." Nevertheless she began holding her dust cloak together, and tried to walk with a lighter step.

Meantime, through the half-drugged sense of being swept along in a tide which nothing could turn, there was stirring in Clytie a confused but impelling desire to confide in Rose—although what she should tell her, or why, she hardly knew. As they turned at the end of the cypress walk and began going back towards the

house, she said to herself—"When we get to the next tree. . . . No, to the tree after the next, if we walk slowly and the others go on in front, then I can tell Rose." And when the last cypress of all was passed, and Lady Mary and Alice had vanished into the garden, she thought, with a sudden contraction of her soul—"What am I thinking of? Of course I can't tell Rose. She wouldn't understand. It wouldn't be right to tell her just now. Besides—there's nothing to tell her——"

Instinctively she turned away from her friend, stepping on to the grass, and walking towards the cedar tree. Hearing somebody coming after her, she turned with her heart beating furiously, and saw that it was only Johnnie.

"Well, Clytie—so you're going to be married to-day," said he, smiling benevolently upon her, and looking curiously unlike himself in his tail coat and *piqué* waistcoat. "You've got a man at last, eh? as our kind Mrs. Mappett would say. I suppose I ought to be glad, but I'm not a bit. I don't half like the idea of your not being at Brocksden any more."

Something within her cried vehemently and unreasonably—"Tell Johnnie!" She stood quite still, looking down at the grass.

"Johnnie"—she murmured, without raising her head.

"Well?" inquired Johnnie, beginning to dribble a round fir cone along the ground in front of him.

"Johnnie"—she repeated; then burst into a nervous laugh.

"I heard you say that before. What is it?" asked Johnnie, and without waiting for an answer kicked the cone between the rose trees, and exclaimed "Goal!"

"I—I. . . . Do you play football much at Eton?"

"Ah, I see you have an eye for the professional style of my kick," said Johnnie complacently.

Laughing rather shrilly, Clytie turned by his side towards the house.

"There's Nanna calling to you to come and dress. You'd better go in. It would never do for you to be late," he told her.

Her bedroom seemed full of women, and she had an impression of smiling faces turned towards her, and kind voices exclaiming—"Ah, here she is!" Lady Cecily was there in her wedding garment of lilac silk, and Rose, and Nanna with her face set in the grimmest lines to avoid crying, and Watkins with crimping irons in her hand.

They made her sit down before the glass, and Watkins, stepping forward alertly, began taking the pins out of her hair.

"What way is it to be done the day, Miss Clytie?" she inquired winking and tittering.

LOVE IN A MIST

Clytie heard a voice answer—"It doesn't need to be done again—it's quite tidy," and realised that it must have been her own, for Lady Cecily exclaimed with horror—

"My dear Clytie! *Quelle idée!* Of course it must be thoroughly brushed and done up again. You remember the way you did it in London for the dinner party, Watkins?—Divided in front, and coiled rather low on the nape of the neck.—Only you must puff out the sides a little, or the veil will fall too flat over the face."

"Aye, an' she'll hae to wear—

Something auld,
Something new,
Something borried, an' something blue,"

said Nanna. "I ran a bit blue ribbon into your chemise on purpose."

"Ye-es, and Miss Clytie's vest is old, and all the rest new," put in Watkins.

"I will lend you my rose point handkerchief then"—said Lady Cecily, "so nurse's old saying will be complete."

They were all fluttering round her like bees round a tree in blossom, and she, standing silent and passive under their ministrations, told herself how kind and good they were—there was Rose actually kneeling on the floor to fasten her shoes; and Aunt Cecily had not sat down once, though standing always tired her. None of them were thinking of themselves,—only of her, while she—No. It was no use. She could feel nothing; neither affection, nor gratitude, nor sorrow, nor fear.—Simply nothing, nothing, nothing.

"My, she'll be the first bride dressed in time that ever I heard tell of," whispered Watkins to Nanna, when Lady Cecily, putting the others aside, herself drew the veil over Clytie's head, and fastened it on with a tiny wreath of real orange blossom.

Rose, hearing a tap at the door, had slipped over to open it, and came back with a little pile of telegrams in her hand.

"Oh, Clytie—here are telegrams for you, five telegrams."

"But dear me! They are not intended to be opened until afterwards. Are they not addressed to Mrs. Le Mesurier? They must go downstairs again at once," cried Lady Cecily, annoyed at the interruption, and feeling that Rose was taking rather much on herself.

"There are three with MacLeod on them," pleaded Rose. "Surely she should open them now."

"Oh well, you can look at these now if you like, Clytie. Only I shall have to put back your veil, and it is so perfectly arranged."

"Let me read them to you, Clytie," cried Rose eagerly. 'Er. . .

'The gamekeeper and outdoor servants at Standalone and Kirstie Cameron beg to wish Miss Clytie all good wishes on this happy day.' . . . How sweet of them, Clytie. How they've remembered you all these years. Oh! This is a foreign one, I think. Hoshiarpur. Where can that be? 'Best of luck MacLeod? Who's MacLeod?'

"Clytie's brother of course. Her half-brother, who is out in India," said Lady Cecily impatiently.

"Why this is another foreign one,—from Munich!—in German too. 'Sei glücklich Gavin.'"

"Gavin. Gavin? Who can that be from. We know nobody of that name," said Lady Cecily.

Clytie said not a word, but held out her hand for the telegram. Rose gave her all three.

"Will it not be from Mr. Buchan, my lady," suggested Watkins.

"Mr. Buchan. Ah, possibly. I rather fancy that was his Christian name. How kind of him to wire," said Lady Cecily coldly. "One more fine hairpin, Watkins. That piece of hair is rather. . . . Thank you. There. I *think* that will do."

Stepping back she surveyed her work critically, her head on one side. Then, with a note of triumph in her voice, she cried, "You must come and look at yourself, Clytie,—No, not in that small glass. The long glass in my room. Carry your train over your arm. Don't let it drag. Come."

She led Clytie along the shadowy passages, everybody following. In a little group at the top of the stairs were clustered the cook and the other maidservants. "Here she comes," they whispered, and stared at her with smiling lips and awestruck eyes.

"Pull up the blind, Watkins, so that she may see herself properly," said Lady Cecily.

The sun rushed into the room. A ray of it fell upon Clytie as she walked slowly forward to the glass. Out of its depths she saw gazing at her a maiden arrayed for her wedding—white dress, white shoes, white flowers, white veil falling over a white face.

She stood motionless, staring at herself, while they all watched her with emotion and admiration. Then suddenly with a despairing cry she flung up her hands, and tore the bridal veil from her head.

A scream of horror burst from the onlookers.

"Are you mad, child? Your beautiful lace veil!" shrieked Lady Cecily, rushing forward; but Clytie with a wild gesture thrust her aside, and, covering her face with her hands, ran blindly from the room.

They had all spoken to her in turn, Lady Cecily with distracted anger, Sir Peter, very stern in spite of the calm reasonableness of his tone, Rose and Nanna, with entreaties and tears. Sitting with her hands clasped before her face, she rocked herself to and fro unceasingly, and answered only by passionate sobs.

The guests had already set off for the church. The bride's carriage was waiting at the door. It was already past twelve. Lady Cecily was on the verge of hysterics. Sir Peter drew her authoritatively from the room, leaving Clytie alone with Rose.

"You *must* try to be calm, Cecily. It will only make matters worse if you break down. Le Mesurier will be here in a few minutes. I sent a groom to stop him on his way to the church. When he comes, he will know how to bring Clytie to her senses—though we can never feel the same to her again after the way she has behaved—unpardonable—absolutely unpardonable. If she had been driven into this marriage against her will . . . but nobody put the least pressure on her. . . . Above all things, Cecily, you must keep calm. If they get to the church by one, they can still motor to Berwick and catch the express. Nobody need know anything more than that the delay was caused by her being unwell."

So Lady Cecily, gasping and moaning, and with Watkins holding a vinaigrette to her nose, endeavoured to restrain her tears lest her face should be disfigured at the marriage which would certainly take place, although an hour late.

Meanwhile Rose, kneeling beside Clytie, was trying to reason with her, while the tears streamed down her face.

"Oh Clytie, darling Clytie—you *can't* break it off now. Think—think what it would mean. He would never get over it. It would break any man's heart. You couldn't do such a thing, Clytie. You must go through with it now."

"You *must*—you *must*." All the world seemed to have been saying that for hundreds of years, and she to have been crouching on the floor listening to it, with a face the colour of clay, and wild tearless eyes, and panting desperate lips.

There was the sound of a motor coming at top speed up the avenue, a momentary bustle of arrival below, and then a quick firm step on the stairs. Through the open door Rose caught a glimpse of a figure in uniform coming along the passage, and letting go of Clytie—who was trembling from head to foot—fled precipitately from the room.

In the kitchen the servants, gathered together with excited

bewildered faces, heard the motor, and knew that the bridegroom had come at last. But in the church the wedding guests, sitting waiting all in their best clothes, were beginning to whisper and wonder, and to look towards the door with growing uneasiness.

Lady Mary in her flowered muslin dress and rose-covered bonnet was standing just inside the schoolroom door. She sprang forward to intercept Rose, who was hurrying by.

"He has come! Captain Le Mesurier has come," said Rose.

"I know. I saw him going along the passage. Oh, Mrs. Milbanke—she is a wicked girl! A wicked, heartless girl!"

"Oh hush, Lady Mary, hush. They might hear you. Come back into the schoolroom. We mustn't stay here. Shut the door."

They tiptoed across to the window; but seeing Captain Jones sitting in the motor below, drew hurriedly back, and went to the table on which lay the unopened telegrams addressed to "Mrs. Le Mesurier".

"If she doesn't marry him now"—burst out Lady Mary passionately, "I hope everybody will cut her!"

"But she will. I know she will. Now that Captain Le Mesurier has come, I know it will all come right. She must be ill, Lady Mary, indeed she must. Clytie would never——"

"I simply don't know what has happened. I was in my room dressing. Mrs. Milbanke—tell me what happened——"

"I can't bear to speak of it. Oh! It was so dreadful. I shall never forget it as long as I live," answered Rose, bursting into tears. Turning her face away, she wept silently.

"How any girl *could* . . . with a man like him," said Lady Mary, drying her own eyes with a little scented handkerchief. "I think he's simply delightful, and far too good for her."

"It must come right—it simply must," sobbed Rose.

Involuntarily they both moved towards the door, opened it cautiously, and stood there straining their ears to catch some sound which might suggest that a reconciliation was taking place behind that closed door at the end of the passage. At first the house seemed completely silent. Then they heard Le Mesurier's voice. It spoke for some time, in low-toned brief questions, with pauses in between. At last it stopped, and there was a low broken answer, and then another long silence. . . . Le Mesurier's voice began again. It was louder and more vehement now; and through its urgency they suddenly heard a sound which chilled their blood—a shrill wild laugh. Horror-struck they retreated into the schoolroom again, with the same thought in both their minds, that Clytie had gone mad.

"It must be long past twelve, and everybody in church waiting. What will they think—Oh, what will they think?" murmured Rose beginning to cry again.

"Oh, Mrs. Milbanke, do sit down. You look *so* tired."

Rose sank heavily into a chair. "If we could only do something to help. It is so terrible, just waiting here, and doing nothing. But of course I know it will all come right quite soon"—she said, trying for her baby's sake to control her increasing agitation. "But, oh dear, everybody will know about it now, it is so late. . . . Everything seems spoilt."

The carriage, which had all this time been waiting at the door, began to drive slowly up and down in front of the house. The rolling of the wheels on the gravel, the trampling of the horses' feet, made it impossible to hear whether the voices in the room at the end of the passage were still speaking. If they had suddenly become quite silent, what did it mean? Rose's suspense was such that, unable to remain seated, she got up and, followed by her companion, went again to the door.

At the same moment the door of Clytie's room opened, and Robin Le Mesurier came out alone. He was dressed in his Hussar uniform, with gold lace on his tunic, and spurs on his boots, but his face was set like a mask of stone. Catching sight of the two girls, who drew back trembling into the shadow of the door, he quickened his step, then suddenly paused, and looked back at them.

"Somebody had better go to Clytie," he said, in a low peremptory voice. Then he passed quickly on, and down the stairs.

4

Captain Jones lay breathing heavily under the green rep canopy of one of the Langmuir beds. He was an exceedingly fit and healthy young man, and having at last made up his mind to go to bed, he had slept until now as quietly and soundly as if there had been no "appalling bust up," as he put it, the day before. Yet he had as stiff a job before him as he ever wished to tackle; for wherever Bob Le Mesurier went on the morrow when he left this "bloody neighbourhood,"—whether to Norway to catch salmon, or to India to shoot big game,—Tony Jones was resolved to go too. This in itself was a sufficiently bleak prospect for one who loved to laugh and rag and sit in the house of mirth rather than walk in the shadow of grief; but there was worse than this. Bob didn't want him to come. He had in fact made it perfectly clear that he intended to go alone, and Bob generally did what he said. "But for all that," said Jones to their host when they were left

alone together later in the evening, "whatever he says, I'm goin' to stick to him like a leech. I mayn't be clever or that sort of thing,—in fact of course I'm not; but I'm damned fond of him; and that's better than nothing, I suppose. No chap who's taken the knock as badly as he has should be let go off by himself. Things might happen. You never know——"

Mr. Warburton, a quiet country gentleman, who had offered to put up the bridegroom and best man, partly because he had years ago been in the 3rd Hussars himself, and partly because his comfortable old house was conveniently situated half-way between Brocksden and the church, and whose embarrassment and concern at the turn events had taken were extreme, replied uneasily that he did not think things were as bad as that. There were times when a man really preferred to be alone. After all, Le Mesurier had quite definitely refused to go home with his uncle.

Jones shook his head obstinately. "You think because Le Mesurier behaves as if nothing had happened, that he's not hard hit, but you're wrong there. You don't know him. I do. Bob's like that. The more he's hurt, the keener he is nobody should see it. He's as proud as the devil. And it isn't only, that it's the rottenest thing that could happen to any fellow. It's *more* than that. You see, he loved that girl. He never talked about it or anything like that, but I knew. I don't believe a man ever loved a woman more,—though what he could see in her, and the way she's treated him!—Good Lord, it's enough to make you sick."

"Have another peg, won't you. . . . There are plenty of women in the world. He'll get over it."

"Yes, I suppose he may get over it." Jones thoughtfully poured himself out a stiff whisky, and diluted it with a little soda. "He must get over it some time, of course. He must realise sooner or later that he put his money on the wrong horse. . . . God knows. Anyway, until he does, I'm goin' to stick to him."

Jones then, was sleeping heavily after all this trouble, when he became vaguely conscious that somebody was speaking to him, was repeating his name with an insistence which aroused his indignation.

"What the devil d'you want?" he demanded at last, without opening his eyes.

It was Le Mesurier's valet, Taylor. Usually a quiet self-contained and reserved man, he seemed now almost beside himself with agitation.

"For Gawd's sake, Captain Jones, get up. We've had a terrible misfortune, sir——"

"All right . . . directly . . ." murmured Jones, turning over

on his other side! Taylor in despair shook his arm violently, until with a smothered "Damn! . . . Oh, all right. I'm coming," he got out of bed. Not yet sufficiently awake to realise what the valet had said to him, but with a confused idea that Le Mesurier wanted him, he slipped his feet into his slippers, and without waiting to put on the dressing-gown which Taylor was holding out for him, went along the passage.

The door of Le Mesurier's room stood wide open, and with a sudden complete wakefulness, and an indescribable sinking in his stomach, he saw that the lock had been smashed. Just inside the door stood Warburton, looking at the carpet, with a very white face. Jones stared at him in bewildered terror. "What's up?" he asked, and went quickly past him into the room. Then he too suddenly stood quite still, and for some time not a word was said.

It was dark in Le Mesurier's bedroom, for the curtains were still drawn. A ray of sunlight forcing its way in between them fell upon the bed. Like all the beds at Langmuir it was a double bed, wide and high. Somebody had lain in it last night, lain upon one side of it, and tossed about a good deal, for the sheet was crumpled and loose, and the bedclothes were thrown back as if he had just left it. On a table beside the bed lay a small bundle of letters, and a half-smoked cigarette.

The eyes of Jones, desperately turning away from something nearer at hand, dwelt upon each of these details without his mind being able to record one of them. At last, with a strong compulsion of his will, he looked towards Robin Le Mesurier. He was sitting in front of the dressing-table. A pair of candles were lighted and their flames flickering in the draught cast a faint tremulous light on his face. He was leaning stiffly back in his chair, and his half-closed eyes seemed to be looking thoughtfully at his own face in the looking glass. A slight blackening of his temple, a little mark like a bruise on the edge of his hair, that was all there was to see; nobody would have noticed the revolver, lying upon the carpet beside him, where it had slipped out of his hand. Glancing in through the door one would have said he had sat down there to shave, and become suddenly lost in thought. But he was dead.

At last Warburton said in a low voice—"I suppose we had better send for the doctor all the same."

"I suppose so," answered Jones dully. He felt neither horror, nor grief, nor even astonishment as yet: only a kind of savage incredulity. But Warburton, going downstairs to give the order, was suddenly and violently sick.

When he came back Taylor was in the room too. With trembling lips, and eyes which a dreadful curiosity impelled to look at his master, and which he shifted constantly back to Jones' face, he was describing how he had discovered it.

"And the Captain's things being still at Brocksden, sir, I thought I had better go over early and fetch them away before the family was up. And as I went past the house, sir, on my way to the stables—it would be about 'arf an hour ago—I looked up and I saw there was a light burning in my master's room; and something told me, sir"—he swallowed convulsively—"as there didn't ought to be a light there at this time o' the morning. But the door was locked and no answer at all; and not liking to break it open on my own responsibility, I went to Mr. Warburton, who was gettin' up himself, bein' disturbed by the knocking." . . .

Becoming conscious that Captain Jones was not understanding a word he was saying, his voice tailed away into silence. A moth flew into the candle, which flared up casting a yellow light on the still face opposite it.—"Oh, blow those damned things out," cried Warburton, in an outburst of nervous irritation.

Taylor made a movement to obey him, but Jones was before him. He blew the candles out, then stared vacantly round him as if wondering what he should do next. His wandering eyes rested upon that stiff upright figure, which he was now so near that he was almost touching it.

"Might make him—a bit more comfortable—don't you think," he muttered.

The three of them lifted Le Mesurier, and, staggering a little under the rigid dead weight, carried him over and laid him on the bed. With trembling hands the valet straightened the bedclothes, and made a movement to draw the sheet over his master's face, but Jones, with a sudden loud groan, collapsed on to the side of the bed, and remained there, clasping Le Mesurier's hand between his own, and making no effort to conceal the tears which had begun to stream down his broad red face. Taylor moved to the window on tiptoe and pulled down the blind. Warburton walked away to the mantelpiece. And Le Mesurier lay on his back staring up at the ceiling with an expression half-thoughtful, half-bewildered, in his blue eyes.

For a seemingly endless twenty minutes, those four waited there, until the door opened, and Doctor MacWhirter came in.

There was nothing to be done, he told them, after a brief formal examination; death must have been instantaneous—"and quite painless, Captain Jones—instantaneous and painless"—he

repeated, glancing sideways at Tony's face which was again convulsed with grief. After that for a time nobody said anything, and they stood round the bed looking helplessly at that face upon the pillow, from which the sunburn was gradually fading, leaving it as white as marble, and upon which, now that its eyes were closed, an expression of peace and joy had come. The lines on his forehead were gone. His lips slightly parted, seemed to smile a little. It was like the face of a boy of twenty.

"Well—it's a pity," said the doctor, slipping his useless stethoscope into his pocket, and turning abruptly away with a grimace of angry pain. . . . "Well now—I'll stay here, and do what has to be done; his servant can help me. And do you, Mr. Warburton, persuade that poor fellow to have something to eat."

He spoke in a whisper, but Tony started violently to his feet and walked towards the door. "I kn-know what to do then," he announced in a hoarse stammering voice. "I know what I'll do. Let me have the motor, will you, Warburton? . . . If you can't, I'll walk."

"Yes, of course. But where are you going?"

"Over there—to Brocksden—to tell *her* what she's done." He came back to the bed again, and pointed to the body with a shaking hand. "Look at him. *Look*. This is what she's done to him. I know what he was better than you do. . . . The regiment was proud of him—we all were. He was only thirty-two. It's bloody murder. That's what it is. For he loved that girl"—he repeated it in a high savage voice—"He loved her, and this is what she's brought him to. And I'm goin' to tell her so."

There was a troubled silence.

Warburton muttered—"Have the motor, if you like. And tell Sir Peter. But I wouldn't see her yourself."

"That's what I'm goin' for—to tell her myself."

"Jones—stop a minute. Don't do it. She'll suffer enough, poor girl, without that."

"That's a true word," said the doctor. "What happiness can there be for her, after—*this*"—and he too pointed to the bed.

Jones strode away muttering—"I don't care. I don't care a bloody damn. I'm goin' to tell her." But, although he dressed himself in feverish haste, and left the house, he ordered no motor, but walked blindly forward, his big feet trampling on the flower-beds, until he gained the shelter of the Langmuir wood, where he wandered aimlessly to and fro, sobbing aloud.

PART III

Death saw I too,
And saw the dawn shine through.

—GEORGE MEREDITH

CHAPTER X

STANDALONE

Jonathan, my brother Jonathan. Would God I had died for thee, my brother Jonathan

I

WHEN tragedy has grasped and wrung us in its awful hands, it may release us, and vanish from our lives, but its shadow remains. Never can we forget the horror of that hour.

It is like a sweet garden across which a battle swept. When the smoke and sound of violence had passed away, the sun shone once more. In a few months flowers were springing up again in the ravished borders. Before a year was passed the grass grew green as before on the trampled lawn. But those who dwelt in the house could not forget that the earth had been soaked in blood. Deep in their souls lay the memory of the day when death ravished their garden. They loved it still. They tended it. They lived in it. But to them it was the same garden no more.

2

It was a grey drizzling January afternoon. For weeks past Mull had lain hidden behind a curtain of mist. Drops hung on each frond of the withered bracken, and fell in slow succession from the needles of the fir trees, and filled to the brim the million fragile cups of the shrivelled ling heather. Rain had collected on either side of the Standalone avenue, so that Johnnie and Clytie had to walk single file along an isthmus of mud. The day was windless; not a white horse broke the leaden expanse of the Sound, and the tide lapped against the shore with a gentle muffled note.

Johnnie took out his handkerchief and wiped his forehead. "Extraordinarily warm, when you consider that it's January,"

he remarked. "One thing is, I won't be sick to-day. It's dead calm. . . . Well—I suppose we should be pressing on. It's nearly four."

"The Carabineer will likely be late to-day with all this mist," said Clytie.

They walked on again in silence except for the monotonous splodge splodge of their feet through the mud. As they descended towards the shore the mist grew more impenetrable, shutting them in on either side, so that they looked like two phantoms wandering through no man's land.

"What a nice old girl Miss Cameron is," said Johnnie, breaking the rather mournful silence. "She seems to be quite happy here too, and that's a great thing."

"It's awfully good of her to have stayed so long. But I can't expect her to . . . I mean, she's got her home in Glasgow, with her sister. I'm sure she must want to go back there. She does a lot of work there among the poor."

"Yes. She would do that. But all the same she's quite right to stop with you now. Relations ought to come before poor people. Besides—. What is she to you exactly, Clytie? I never heard of her before she came to the wed—to Brocksden."

He corrected himself quickly, growing rather red, for although he had now been at Standalone a fortnight, no word or reference to the past tragedy had been spoken by Clytie or himself. Nanna had maintained a like silence. Miss Cameron alone had, one evening, told him something of that journey North, when three forlorn women had followed the very road which should have been taken by the bridegroom and his bride; Clytie so stupefied by the shock that for the time being she moved like one deaf and blind and dumb; Nanna old and tremulous and wretched; and herself overwhelmed by the sudden responsibility thrust upon her.

"She's a distant cousin," said Clytie. "And she's my half-brother's aunt too. Her sister was his mother."

"That's it, is it. Well, it's a great convenience having her just now. . . . But it's simply rotten not having you at Brocksden, Clytie. There's no sense in it."

"It was awfully good of you to come all this way to see me, Johnnie, at this time of year," said Clytie. "I'll never forget it." Her voice trembled as she spoke; and Johnnie, afraid she was going to cry, answered quickly—

"Not a bit of it. I've always wanted to see Standalone. Besides it really was a convenience to me coming here for my

holidays. I didn't want to go to Mentone—that long expensive journey for those few weeks. I'll go there in the spring."

"How long are Aunt Cecily and Uncle Peter going to". . . . Clytie's voice tailed away into silence.

"To stop abroad? Depends on how my mother is. Oh yes, she *is* better, but she still has those fainting fits. Nervous breakdowns are queer things!—But anyhow, she likes Mentone. She's been brighter since they went there. It's hard on my father, though. He's never happy away from Brocksden."

Clytie said nothing, but the expression of brooding melancholy which had stamped itself upon her face, became sombrely pronounced.

"It must be bonny here when the heather's out," remarked Johnnie.

"Yes."

"I'll maybe come again in August, Clytie. I'd like to do some sailing. That looks a jolly boat you've got in the boat-house."

"Do, Johnnie. The *Moti's* an old boat, but I'll have her overhauled and ready for you. We can go sailing up the lochs"—cried Clytie, with a ring of the old eagerness in her voice.

"That's the Carabineer coming now," said Johnnie, looking to where a dark bulk was emerging from the mist. It steamed slowly down the middle of the Sound leaving a black trail of smoke behind it. As they watched, it gave a warning hoot, and headed for Standalone Bay. A group of country folk were waiting on the pier to go aboard.

At the sight of them Clytie's step faltered. "I—I'll not come farther, Johnnie, if you don't mind. Sandy is there all right with your things. I'll say good-bye now."

"All right. I suppose I'd better go. . . . I say, Clytie—you're awfully thin, aren't you?"

"I'd hate to be fat"—she murmured, reddening, and trying to laugh.

Johnnie was standing with his back to the steamer, his eyes fixed uneasily on his cousin. During the past fortnight he had grown used to the alteration in her appearance, but now, in this hour of parting, he was startled by it as if for the first time. She seemed to have grown so small somehow, and her face wore that withered look of grief so seldom seen except in the very old. Her eyes were sunken and apathetic. The red of her hair had faded like the bracken at her feet. Even Robin Le Mesurier could not have thought her pretty now.

"I don't believe you're well. You ought to take a tonic," he muttered.

"I do take one. . . . Good-bye, dear Johnnie—it was ripping of you to come."

She put her hand on his damp tweed shoulder, and kissed him on the cheek. His face grew suddenly red. In a tone of angry affection he burst out—"Look here, Clytie—what's the use of going on making yourself wretched over what's past and done with? You never were like this before and I hate to see it! You'll make yourself really ill, you know, if you don't look out. What's the good of it, old girl? It wasn't your fault. . . . I mean, you couldn't help it if you didn't care for him enough to marry him. Besides—even if you were to blame, he'd no right to—do what he did."

As he spoke Clytie's face had gradually become very white, but at the last words the blood rushed to it.

"Y-you—mustn't say that"—she cried in a trembling voice.

"It's true all the same, and I never let anybody blame you when I'm there," said Johnnie doggedly.

"It's . . . not true. . . . I can't talk about it. . . . I—I'll walk to the pier with you, Johnnie."

"No, don't come farther. It's raining. Go home and change. Good-bye."

In the reaction of embarrassment which had followed his impetuous outburst, he wished nothing more than to be gone. At this moment he wondered why he had ever come to this place of mist and sadness. It had been a beastly journey, and he had done no good. He would go back to his own most satisfying life, and forget all about it. He walked towards the boat, resolved not to look back; but when he reached the pier, something seemed to compel him to turn and wave his hand. From the top of the small brae she waved back to him, and remained standing there until she saw him climb on board the Carabineer.

It was dusk when she got back to Standalone. The lamp was lighted in the oak parlour, and Miss Cameron sat by the fire knitting. She rose with the cheerful briskness which always characterised her movements, and bent down, her full black skirt swinging up at the back and giving a glimpse of thick ankles and knitted stockings, to lift the kettle from the hearth.

"Come along, my dear. It's just boiling, and I'll make you a fresh cup of tea in a minute. Raining still I see.—You changed your feet, didn't you? Poor John Wyse will have an unpleasant journey."

Clytie sat down at the tea table, and hid her wet and muddy boots under it.

"The steamer was rather late I suppose." Miss Cameron's stout capable hands carefully measured out two caddy lids' of tea, and tilted the kettle, which action was followed by the pleasant hissing sound of boiling water pouring upon silver. "I expected you back sooner. . . . Now we must let it infuse for a minute."

She put the kettle back on the hob, and picking up her knitting returned to her seat.

In the daytime the oak parlour was rather a gloomy room, for the panelling which ran from floor to ceiling was dark with age; but at this hour, with firelight and lamplight contending to reflect themselves upon its polished surface, the parlour was at its best. It was a comfortable ugly room. The clumsy solid furniture and the really valuable old china in the glass-fronted cupboard—relics of a past age—contrasted oddly yet not unpleasantly with the early Victorian touches introduced in Aunt Betsy's time. There were faded photographs of long-forgotten ladies in crinolines or in chignons and bustles, and of children with bare arms and low necks. There was a small ivory bullock cart from India with a glass shade over it; a musical box with a little bear on the top of it, which had once danced when it played; and various vases poised on the heads of carefully draped angels. The thick green and red and purple woollen hearth-rug had been the work of Aunt Betsy's hands, and, peering back into the mists of childhood Clytie could just remember her making it with squares of coarse canvas, and innumerable balls of wool, and scissors which went snip-snap in a fascinating manner through the gaily coloured loops. A round mahogany table had from time immemorial stood in the middle of the room, but the albums and knick-nacks which were grouped on it were first put there by Aunt Betsy, and she too had introduced the wire stand filled with ferns which blocked one of the long narrow windows. The smart English tenants had evidently given up the room as a bad job, for nothing had been altered.

Over the mantelpiece hung a large oil portrait of Clytie's mother, a lovely young woman in white muslin, coming along a woodland path with her bonnet hanging by blue ribbons from her arm. Farther along the wall was a water colour of Clytie's father, in a queer loose-fitting tweed suit, with side whiskers, scowling black eyebrows, very red hair, and a spaniel at his feet.

"I can really think of nothing else to-day, Clytie, but this great news from India, of dear Donald's marriage," said Miss Cameron. "I can hardly believe it yet. It seems only yesterday that he was

just a schoolboy at Auchterlonie for his holidays, when my dear father was alive. And yet it was high time for him to think of getting married, for he must be . . . let me see—he must be nearly thirty-five.”

During the past months Clytie had heard more of her almost unknown half-brother than in all her life before. At Brocksden, Donald MacLeod was only “Colonel MacLeod’s son by his first marriage,” a person whose existence was regrettable since it prevented Clytie from being the heiress of Standalone. To Miss Cameron, on the contrary, Donald seemed the most important being in the world, and Clytie’s chief claim to recognition that she was his half-sister. She was warmly attached to her nephew, with whose upbringing, after the death of his mother, she had been much concerned; and, although it was fourteen years or more since he had gone to India, she liked nothing better than talking of him.

“I should say this makes it certain we shall have him home this summer. He will want to show his bride Standalone . . . besides he must know how we are all longing to see him. Five years since he was home last! Far too long on end to be in that nasty climate.—But you must have seen him when he was at home last, Clytie?”

“Yes. He came to Brocksden for the shooting.”

“He was always a splendid shot, so fond of it too. Standalone was let last time, which was so unfortunate, but he could not very well break the lease when he was only home for six months. ‘How I hope this will be a good year for the grouse.’”

Clytie’s eyes turned quickly away from her cousin’s face, and looked past her towards the window. Something throbbed in her heart like an exposed nerve which is suddenly touched. Donald—at Standalone! Was she to lose Standalone too? And why not—since Standalone was his, and his young bride was now the real mistress of the house. She reasoned thus, against a feeling of anger and desolation which was rising in her.

“I am sure, Clytie, they will expect you to live with them while they are at home,” went on Miss Cameron, dimly aware from Clytie’s gaze that something was amiss. “Donald is goodness itself, and his young wife—she’s only twenty-two you know, Clytie—what a delightful friend she will be for you!”

“Of course I couldn’t stay here; it would be impossible,” answered Clytie, and in spite of her desire to conceal her feelings, a scowl of pain distorted her face.

“Well dear, we shall see.” Miss Cameron bent forward and patted her arm. “When you know Donald better——” A sudden

qualm seized her lest she should be taking too much on herself in voicing her nephew's future intentions. . . . "That is—I mean, if the young couple wanted to be alone—and just at first you know they very naturally might—why, you must just come and stop with us in Glasgow, you know." . . . A second qualm here affected her, for the house was her sister's, and Jessie had never been fond of visitors. Nevertheless she added with more conviction than she actually felt, "Jessie would be so glad to have you".

Clytie had a sudden vision, almost clairvoyant in its distinctness, of a tall town house and two middle-aged women, and streets, and mud, and smoke. The vehement cry surged to her lips—"I'd rather sleep by the dyke-side than live in Glasgow"—but at the sight of the eager hospitality on her Cousin Maggie's face, she suppressed it; and a sensation of aching gratitude made her eyes smart.

"It's more than kind of you, Cousin Maggie."

"Not at all, my dear. A young person in the house . . . it would brighten it up for both of us." Miss Cameron absently poured herself out another cup of tea, and began sipping it without noticing its tepidity. "Of course I know it's the fashion in Scotland to look down on Glasgow. To tell you the truth I used to do it myself; and it was quite a shock to me when Jessie got engaged to poor Andrew who was 'Glesca born and bred'—though the Cochranes are really quite a good family. But when Andrew was taken from us, and Jessie felt lonely, all by herself, in that great Huntley Gardens house. . . .

She had begun knitting again, and the click-click of her needles, and the occasional shifting of the wood on the fire, mingled with the unceasing staccato of her voice. . . . Andrew and Jessie and Huntley Gardens; Glasgow and the slums and the girls' club; how many times in the last months had Clytie sat, as now, in the oak parlour, and listened to those things which had become as much household words to her as the new fox covert at Brocksden used to be, and the contretemps of Johnnie's motor bicycle. And Cousin Maggie was so kind: it would be horrible of Clytie if she grudged her this hour of talking after tea. . . . Johnnie would be past Lochalin by now. . . . Johnnie, who had said. . . . No. No. She would not remember what he had said. Even as she repeated this resolve, a sensation of intolerable restlessness oppressed her. It seemed impossible to breathe in this hot room. Little beads of perspiration formed on her forehead. Cousin Maggie's talk went on and on. Would she never come to the end of what she was saying?

Miss Cameron had come to the heel of her stocking. She paused, counting the stitches in a humming undertone. Clytie got up and went over to the window. Half-concealed by the curtains she shoved up the heavy sash, and a wave of damp air leapt in against her face. The rain had stopped. A watery moon was rising above the moor.

"Where are you going, dear? To dress for dinner?"

With her hand on the door handle, Clytie reluctantly answered—"Presently.—It's quite early yet. I was just going out for a bit."

"Oh no, my dear. I beg you won't go out again this raw evening—everything's soaking wet." . . .

"It's stopped raining, and there's a moon."

"I really can't have you walking about in the dark by yourself. There'll be no moon to speak of to-night. Besides—it really is not suitable. I beg you won't do it, Clytie."

Cousin Maggie's voice had changed from its kindly chattiness to the authoritative tone of the elderly relative who expects to be obeyed. Coming from her, this tone always brought a flash of rebellion to Clytie's eyes. What right had she to try to keep her in this close room, when she might be out under the night sky, and go down to the shore, and watch the tide coming in. But people of that age were all the same. If you were a girl, they couldn't leave you alone. Look at the way Aunt Cecily had. . . .

The flush upon her face died away, leaving it as pale as before. What did it matter really? Nothing mattered now. Even her love of Standalone, which had for a moment flickered up, was ashes like the rest.

With a weary indifference, she answered, "All right, Cousin Maggie. I'll dress for dinner then."

3

Upon a February afternoon of mist and sunshine, Clytie turned out of the avenue gate and set her face along the high road which here runs between the grounds of Standalone and the open moor. Rain or fine it was her custom now to roam upon the hills for hours; not that the beauty of her beloved Standalone had any more the power to give her joy, but that sorrow itself was more endurable alone upon the moors, and away from the house and Cousin Maggie. The old maid and the young had been together now for more than seven months. Sometimes, looking up at meals, or during the long evenings, at the cheerful, middle-aged face

opposite her, Clytie would wonder in a dull misery if she could really be the same Clytie who had walked with Robin in the park wearing that new hat which he had chosen for her, or lain among the blue-bells at Kew. . . . Cousin Maggie was kind, and more than kind; but oh! if she only would go back to her sister in Glasgow, and leave Clytie alone with Nanna and Standalone. But she would not. She seemed resolved to sacrifice herself, whether Clytie was willing she should do so or not.

She presently left the road, and, walking fast and doggedly but with a springless step, struck northwards across the moor. Her feet sank deeply in the withered heather and crushed the curling fronds of the young bracken as she passed. On her left rose the misty outline of the hills; to the right the moor undulated away, gradually sinking to the unseen sea. The view was all shut out to-day by a thin grey mist that concealed the horizon.

After about an hour's walking she came to where the sea, cleaving the mainland in two, runs inland for some thirty miles in the narrow but fair loch called Sunart. As she reached this point the sun for a moment shone through the mist, giving her a glimpse of that opposite shore which had always fascinated her as a child, with its rugged cliffs and the deep caves clearly perceptible in them, and the deserted rocky beach in front. Where she stood the Morven shore was at its loneliest, no house within sight or hail, everywhere moors, or, below the heather, short sea grass, and below that again grey rocks and orange seaweed and restless green sea. Clytie sat down under the lee of a rock, for the wind blew coldly from the Atlantic, and fixed her eyes blankly upon the rising and falling waves. Sitting there, in her black serge dress and white sunken face, she was a dark spot against the green and brown of the hill-side, and no longer seemed a part of nature, but rather a maimed and suffering thing apart, like a wounded rabbit or a bird with a broken wing. Unconscious of her forlorn aspect on the landscape, she remained there for a long while, outwardly motionless, but within struggling fiercely to keep her thoughts at bay, evade them, stun them,—somehow hold them back from that object to which they ever returned, Robin Le Mesurier.

It is a pain to me to write of this time of Clytie's life, when the very monotony of grief—like that drip—drip upon the head of the victim in the cold-water torture—became in its gnawing iteration less bearable than the wild anguish of the earlier months. It would be heavy to tell, and but sad and weary work to read how often she had lived through again every hour of her inter-

course with Robin ; remembering here a wounding coldness on her part, and there a yielding which should indeed have pledged her to the extreme issue. Night and day he seemed to stand before her, her proud and resolute lover, with his blue eyes, his lips half-smiling half-ironic, his long lean graceful body, his silence and his laughter. Haughty and sometimes perverse to others he might be, but never to her. He had been beautiful, masterful, courageous, and capable of a great love—and she had destroyed him. Her soul lay prone upon the earth in its remorse and woe ; and the words rose a thousand times to her lips “How could I do it—how could I do it”. . . . Of that other, the innocent and beloved cause of all, she would not allow herself to think, driving his image away, and turning from it almost with horror. The thought that, before Robin had lain six months in his grave, she could, even for a second and in her innermost soul, find happiness with another, was frightful to her. And yet at twenty-one a life devoid of joy is impossible to contemplate ; so it may be that the seed of hope, unwatered and untended, still grew in her subconsciousness, preserving her sanity. Certain it is that the aching misery which filled her heart was the bitterer to bear because, in all those months, no sign or word of comfort had come to her from across the sea.

It is not good for the very young to be alone with grief, but to the heart which is bereft of love, mere sympathy can bring no healing. Clytie blamed neither God nor man for what had been, but only herself ; yet the world seemed a cruel place to her, poor child, and the pity of Miss Cameron was intolerable to her. She held it at arm's length with pale-lipped smiling courtesy. Even to Nanna her manner was changed ; the intimacy of old days was gone ; only the affection remained.

The short February day was drawing to its close, and the sun was already setting when she rose from the ground. For a minute she stood, watching the glowing orb as it sank into the Atlantic and all the grey land and seascape suddenly woke to ecstasy, the clouds and waves turning from amber to crimson, and the bold outline of Ardnamurchan Point standing out a deep indigo against the golden sky. Such moments only served to remind her of the thrilling happiness with which they used to fill her. The grey mist which was stealing up the Sound and blotting out the gracious lines of the hills, was more akin to her heavy mood. With a sigh she turned, and, taking the shore road this time, set off steadily in the direction of Standalone ; and her solitary figure was presently swallowed up by the mist.

Miss Maggie Cameron sat by the fire, occupied in basting together various shapeless garments of pink flannelette. As she stitched, the room darkened. The window-frames rattled violently. Rain lashed against the panes and streamed down them blotting out the world outside.

Miss Cameron clucked distressfully.

"Di-di-di-! what an afternoon! If only Clytie hasn't wandered too far. She'll be soaked before she gets in. . . . I should have prevented her going when it looked so threatening—but one can hardly expect the poor child to sit in the house all day."

She bent over her work again, with a troubled expression on her kind plain face. Miss Maggie had never been pretty; even in her youth she could only have been described "a sonsie lass," and it was now years since she had become one of the army of elderly unmarried ladies, who spend their lives in doing unto others what they never expect others to do for them. Capable, kindly, simple, she would have been an almost perfect character, but that the pudding lacked salt—in other words her sense of humour was negligible. Attired rather with a view to neatness than to fashion, she was at times mistaken for a respectable upper servant; but nobody after hearing her speak could continue in such an error. Church was the only recreation in which she indulged herself without measure, and the extent of the sacrifice which she was making for Clytie's sake may be gauged by the fact that the nearest Episcopal church was in Oban. She sadly missed her weekly Communion and her church work; and, although the most modest of women, she was harassed by wonderings as to how the Rev. Mr. Beith was getting on without her.

Had she been able to comfort Clytie, she would have minded none of those things, for a generous pity was of the very essence of her being. That the girl was bitterly unhappy she could not doubt. For months now, Miss Maggie had been praying that she might be the means of leading this stricken young creature to the only comforter of those who mourn. But in spite of this, Clytie's reserve held her ever at arm's length; and no words had yet passed between them of the tragic event which had led to their heavy companionship.

"It must be my fault, I'm afraid . . . something wanting in me, or she'd have turned to me before now," said poor Miss Maggie half-aloud. The storm waxed more boisterous without. The

room was darker than ever. The need for some human companionship, somebody with whom she could talk it over, became urgent. Gathering up her work, she left the room, and went along the passage and up the back stairs.

"May I come in, Rutherford? I need the machine for my chemmies. . . . What a day, and Miss Clytie out in it."

"She'll may be hae taen shelter at Sandy Macpherson's," said Nanna, who had risen and was fumbling with the cover of the machine. "I doot it's no verra clean. I hanna had occasion tuse it this while back."

"It will do me very well." Miss Cameron's capable square hands whipped off the cover and manipulated the handle. "Sit down again, Nurse. I didn't come up to disturb you."

The whirring note of the old machine filled the room for several minutes. When it slackened and stopped. "Nurse"—said Miss Cameron, without raising her eyes from her work; "Nurse, we have been here—let me see—July, August . . . over seven months now. It was the day after the funeral that we left Brocksden, and that was the 29th—nearly eight months ago. Tell me, honestly, do you think Miss Clytie is getting over it at all?"

Nanna—who had grown very old of late, taking an hour to get through a task which she could have done in ten minutes a year before—looked with a quivering face at her interlocutor, and answered nothing.

"You know her so much better than I do—I thought perhaps you might have noticed some improvement. Not that I would have her take it lightly—God forbid!—such a terrible thing to happen! But time, you know . . . even with the worst sorrows it makes a difference, especially with the young. . . . Do you think she is getting over it at all?"

"A do not, Miss Cameron. A dinna think her better. A think she's wurse."

"It is really most distressing. I had such hopes Mr. Wyse's visit would cheer her up. I hardly know what to do. Perhaps if we had that new doctor over from Oban—they say he's excellent—"

"She has nae need o' doctors, Miss. What cud they do for her? It's the saul that's sick." Nanna's thin knotted hands began feebly fumbling for her handkerchief. Bursting into tears, she moaned—"they hae brokken her hairt amang them—ma bairn, ma bairn!"

"Now Rutherford—come, come. If you allow yourself to break

down like this, I shall not feel it right to talk to you about it. And you are the only person I have to advise me, you know."

There was a pause during which, to give Nanna time to recover herself, Miss Cameron ran up her last seam, tore off the raw foot of the chemise with a rasping sound, and, pulling a needle out of the front of her dress, began hemming it.

"I really think that if we see no improvement when the spring comes, I shall have to write to Sir Peter Wyse and see if he approves of my taking her abroad."

"A dinna see what gude we'd get frae that. She's aye happier here than anywhere else"—protested Nanna.

"Oh, but a change of air is a great thing. There can be no doubt about that. I've seen it work wonders. Something really must be done to rouse her. . . . This is the way young ladies drift into a decline, and there have been cases of consumption in the MacLeod family before now."

Nanna's red-rimmed dim eyes gazed mournfully into the fire. They closed. Her chin nodded on to her bosom, and through her half-open mouth came a whistling sound. Miss Maggie stretched forward quietly for the reel, and went on sewing in silence.

A door banged below. Nanna woke with a start. "That's her"—she cried, and at the sound of listless feet coming up the stairs, both women hurried to the door.

5

Winter—the soft wet winter of the West Highlands, tarried long that year, and it was wellnigh April before the breath of the spring was felt in the air, with bursting buds, and here and there a primrose thrusting up its solitary face through the wet earth, and sheep suckling their feeble long-legged lambs under the shelter of the dyke. With its coming a profound physical languor fell upon Clytie. Her grief itself was numbed and listless. It was too great an effort now to tramp across the boggy moor; and every day found her loitering along the shore, watching the waves unceasingly rising to a blatter of foam, or falling to a glimpse of dank tangled sea-weed and rocks leprous with barnacles.

One grey still morning when she had walked farther than usual and was about to turn back again, the sun shone out dispelling the mist, and, casting its rays into a pool left behind by the outgoing tide, turned it into a water baby's garden. There was a floor of golden sand with pink rocks sloping down to it. Sea-weed, rose coloured and purple, grew in its depths, and crimson anemones

stretched out their fingers to the sun. A little crab left the shelter of one stone, and scuttled across to another. It was the sea-garden of her childhood come back to her again. . . . In the shock of joy everything else was forgotten. Tearing off her shoes and stockings, she slipped down and dangled her bare feet in the water. It was almost warm. There was not a soul in sight. Quickly she drew her feet out again, sprang up, and began to undress. The gentle sunshine caressed her thin naked body. She stepped down into the golden water, and let it close above her head. . . . Oh wonderful other world of the sea folk. Around her all was cool and green, flecked with quivering lines of gold; above her swam the sun, a golden orb upon a lake of blue. Her toe touched an anemone, which shut up in a great fright: it felt like cold velvet. . . . Her dripping head emerged, with eyes smarting from the salt water, and laughing mouth, into the sunshine again. The air was colder than the water. It was certainly a fairy pool. The gude folk of Standalone had come back to her again. Drying herself with her chemise, she slipped on her semet, and stood looking from the pool to the sea, from Ardnamurchan to the moors behind her. Already half the sky was blue, and the mist was driven farther back every minute. Upon the hill a curlew was calling to its mate.—Would there be primroses yet up the Tanna burn? She believed there would. Then, as she slipped into her tweed dress, she seemed to hear a voice near by, calling—"Are you presentable, Clytie?" It came from the other side of the boulder which sheltered her; and it was no longer a boulder, but a hornbeam brake. The months vanished. The wavelets lapping on the shore had become the waters of the Thames. In a moment Robin would come out from behind the tree where he had dressed after their bathe, and stand before her, his shirt open at the neck, his hair wet, his blue eyes smiling at her. . . .

"Oh come, darling—only come, and I'll do anything you like," she sobbed—throwing out her arms as if to embrace the intangible air.

6

It might be a week after this, that Miss Maggie first began to notice a slight change for the better in Clytie. The grey sunken look which had shadowed her face all those months, seemed to be lifting. Her attitude towards her cousin was different. She made an effort now to talk at meals, and something of the warmth of affection replaced the cold courtesy of her earlier manner. In the old days at Auchterlonie Miss Maggie had been a great

gardener, and now, after ten years of town life, her enthusiasm had returned again. The Standalone garden, long neglected by the tenants, became a source of common interest to them. Together they made lists of bulbs and seeds, planned out the summer borders, sowed the sweet-peas in long lines and helped Sandy to prick out the seedlings.

The pathetic pleasure of the older woman at the least sign of interest shown in her work in Glasgow, stirred in Clytie a strong compunction. It was this feeling which wrung from her a reluctant consent to accompany her cousin to Glasgow for ten days in June, when a special church mission effort was to be made in which Miss Cameron was most anxious to take part. The idea of going among strange faces, and being surrounded by an emotional Evangelical atmosphere, filled Clytie with a shrinking sense of inhibition; but, realising that Miss Cameron was quite resolved not to go without her, she conquered her repugnance with a supreme effort, and even pretended that she would rather like to come. None then so happy as Miss Maggie, who, for all her eager sympathy, was unskilled to read the hidden emotion behind the spoken word. The parlour was filled with the joyful scratching of her pen as she wrote to the Rev. Mr. Beith offering her services, and to her sister Jessie bidding her prepare for two guests. The kind spinster was glad to the heart's core at this change of attitude in her young cousin, and attributed it mainly to the grace of God, but a little also to the twelve bottles of Ragot's Nourishing Stout which she had got from Oban, and compelled Clytie to drink. She now wove schemes in her head of a future, happy in spite of all, in which Clytie, chastened but no longer crushed by her grief, should fall under the influence of Mr. Beith, become interested in working among the poor, settle down in Glasgow with Jessie and herself, and finally—who knows—make as happy a marriage there as Jessie had done!

And now Spring herself took possession of the land. The garden was all filled with daffodils dancing and bowing in the breeze; the braes were yellow with primroses, and the air was scented with bog myrtle. Blue-bells lay like fallen bits of sky among the grass, and everywhere the birds piped their love song to their mates.

One Sunday Miss Cameron had been to service as usual at the Gaelic Kirk, and Clytie—who still shrank from accompanying her—had walked to meet her on her way home. It was a warm day. Miss Maggie's square-toed black kid boots were covered with dust, and little beads of perspiration were forming on her forehead.

On Sunday she issued forth in full Sabbath panoply, flowered bonnet, mantle and long skirt—garments which she vaguely felt to be more seemly upon the Lord's day than her grey tweed—and she suffered correspondingly during the two mile walk.

"Shall I carry your mantle, Cousin Maggie?"

"Thank you, my dear.—Don't crumple the chiffon frill. Rather pretty, isn't it? I much prefer that simple trimming, to beads. Ah-h! quite a relief to have it off. It is really quite hot."

"I wish we could bathe," murmured Clytie, looking down at the smiling blue sea beside which their road ran.

"Ha ha! I quite wish we could. But we are not in the Garden of Eden, worse luck," said Miss Maggie, into whose modest mind the idea of bathing without a "costume" had never so much as entered.

A smooth blue wave rolled lazily up the beach, sparkled into foam, and retreated into the depths again. In the boggy ground between the road and the shore the bog asphodels raised their slender golden spikes, and Clytie was carrying a great bunch of scented orchises and bell heather, which she had picked as she came along. A missel-thrush flew out of the fir tree at the corner, alighted again on the topmost branch, and began to sing. It was the male bird. Very certainly his mate was sitting on her nest in the fork of the tree. In the old days Clytie would have been up, and secured an egg within three minutes of the bird flying out. Now she only paused for a moment below the tree, peering up to try and see where the nest was built.

As she did so, a verse long forgotten leapt up to her mind—

—As the song of a bird in May, shall my song be,
That fast in a brake all day sits bowered, and sings:
For there in his chosen home to his mate pipes he,
Nor cares for a while to roam on travelling wings. . . .

"Hark! did you hear it? There again now. It is the first I've heard this year. I must wish at once"—exclaimed Miss Maggie, black kid finger uplifted.

A little voice from the unseen hollow of the moor repeated shrilly—"Cuc-koo—Cuc-koo—Cuc-koo".

Next morning, having hurried through her housekeeping and accounts in order to join Clytie in the garden, Miss Maggie found no trace of her except the half-empty watering-can, and the tools scattered on the grass. She was the more astonished at this, since Clytie had seemed so restlessly anxious to set about her work, that she had hardly consented to sit through breakfast. She

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never came back for lunch, but appeared again at tea-time, when she received her cousin's remonstrances with a listless and exhausted air. With a shudder she refused Miss Maggie's suggestion of "just a glass of Ragot's Nourishing Stout"; and though she consented to lie down on the sofa with a book, Miss Cameron, opening her eyes again after the briefest nap, found herself alone in the room.

A restlessness which she was unable to conceal, seemed to have taken possession of Clytie; and this restlessness was most pronounced in the mornings when the post came in. Before its arrival she seemed able to settle to nothing. If she was in the house, she wandered out of it. If she was outside, she kept returning to the house. Miss Cameron wondered whether her long estrangement from her Aunt Cecily was weighing upon her mind. Had she perhaps written to her, and received no answer? On one occasion when Clytie, having opened the letter-bag and handed Miss Cameron her letters, turned away with a look of sullen misery, she could not refrain from asking—"Were you expecting to hear from anybody, dear?"

"No," said Clytie quickly: adding, after a minute, with an undertone of bitterness which did not escape her listener—"Who should write to me?"

For several mornings after this, as though to emphasise her indifference, she went out an hour before the post was due; but Miss Maggie, sitting in the parlour, heard well how, returning, she went straight to the table in the hall where the letters were put. She pondered much as to whether it were not her duty to inform Lady Cecily, and entreat her to be reconciled with Clytie: but a certain family pride—for why should Donald MacLeod's sister go down on her knees to the Wysees who had cast her off?—made her hesitate. She now pinned her hopes upon the visit to Glasgow, telling herself that change of scene, and the effect of getting to know Mr. Beith, would surely work wonders. Her chagrin was the greater when, a few days before their departure, Clytie suddenly told her that she had decided not to come with her.

"But good gracious, Clytie—how is it possible you can change your mind like this, when you had absolutely decided, and your Cousin Jessie expecting you, and everything!"

"I am very sorry, very sorry, Cousin Maggie . . . but I can't come. . . . I'm not up to it just now."

The next two days were passed in a series of scenes of persuasion and expostulation. For all her kindliness, Miss Cameron could

show resolution when she thought it right. Having by this time so involved herself with the mission that nothing short of severe illness would justify her withdrawal, she was determined that Clytie should accompany her: but her efforts were met with an almost despairing resistance. The struggle did much to alienate the affection between them. Hurt and vexed, Miss Maggie could not help reflecting that her months of devotion had deserved a better return than this; and, in spite of herself, her manner towards Clytie on leaving, was cold. She was resolved to cut her visit as short as possible, but in this she was actuated for the first time for many weeks by a sense of duty, rather than by pity and affection.

7

Miss Cameron had been gone five days, and Nanna, who was by no means ill-pleased at her absence, had brought her knitting into the parlour, where she sat dozing, her well-worn carpet slippers stretched out towards the fire. The sound of somebody moving across the room wakened her with a start.

"Eh? . . . what is't you're wantin', ma bairn?"

"Nothing, Nanna. I'll be back in a minute."

It was nine o'clock, and Kirstie had bolted the front door and gone to bed. Clytie unfastened it, and stepped out on to the door step. It was a dark still night, only a star here and there peeping out between the clouds. The washing of the tide upon the shingle sounded very near. She half-turned as if to go back into the house, but instead shut the door softly, and began walking along the grass border towards the back avenue gate. It was pit mirk under the overhanging laurels; she kept walking into them, or slipping on to the gravel off the grass; but once through the gate the shrubs ceased and she could see again. Pausing, she looked silently up and down the deserted high-road, then, bending her ear towards the ground, she listened intently. The tide must be just turned, for the swishing roar of the waves and the ensuing rattle of pebbles had stopped, and only the vague murmuring of the sea remained.

Motionless and silent she stood there, until from the house below her came the sound of a voice querulously calling. For a while she closed her ears to it, and did not move. Then with a deep breath, and without raising her head, she began slowly walking back towards the house.

The figure of Nanna emerged from the darkness, a squat shape

with a shawl over its head, and a flickering candle in its hand. Her scolding voice met Clytie as she approached—"They gude hoose slippers 'll be ruined, that's what it is—and gin ye catch your death o' cauld, ye'll hae naebody t' thank but yoursel'!"

"Hoots toots!" said Clytie, reaching the steps, and putting her cold arm round Nanna's neck; "sic a steer tae mak because a buddy gangs oot for a daunder."

They went upstairs together, Nanna completely mollified, although duty compelled her to burst into an indignant "See there now!" as she held up the bronze slippers with their heels covered with mud. When she had tucked Clytie into bed, and seen her drink a tumbler of black currant tea which she had descended to brew for her in the kitchen, she withdrew to her own room, regretting that the precious half-hour had come to an end. Looking in later with her candle she saw that Clytie was already asleep.—"It's the black curr'nt tea"—she told herself with satisfaction. "A gran' thing for keepin' aff a chill and makkin' you drop over. . . . She has been mair hersel' they last days than ony time since Miss Cameron came here. We aye got on fine, her an' me, an' never neededither folk tae come buttin' in. She's a dooce honest leddy, A'll no denee it—but since she's returned tae Glesky it's a peety she canna just bide there, and leave me and ma bairn tae oorsels."

About the last hour of the night, Clytie woke suddenly, with a curious eerie sensation as though somebody had called her name. For a minute she lay motionless, scarcely breathing, a prey to her old childish fear of being alone in the dark; then timidly opening her eyes she saw that the grey light of the dawn was beginning to steal in round the edge of the blind.

She sat up . . . then suddenly sprang out of bed, and ran, almost frantically, to the window. It had come on wet again in the night, and the rain was drip-dripping from the eaves. The garden and shrubbery had an unfamiliar look. Against the dark green of the rhododendrons she could see the fine white streaks of the falling rain. The old Scots firs stood out like phantoms against the grey sky. A dank wind suddenly sprang up, making the ivy rustle, fluttering the sleeves of her nightgown, and blowing her hair across her eyes. . . . What was it that had wakened her? What could it have been to have wakened her so suddenly? . . . Trembling with cold and fear—and with something else—she leant out over the wet sill until she could see the whole stretch of the gravel. . . . —*Who* was that, standing on the doorstep and looking up at her? Her head swam. For a moment she could see

nothing, but leant there, clinging to the window ledge. Then her eyes cleared, and she saw that it was only the gnarled stem of the old ivy by the door bell—nothing else was there.

. . . Nobody underneath her window. . . . Nobody lurking in the black shadow of the ash tree. . . . No sound of a footfall coming towards her down the deserted avenue. . . . The wind lulled and rose again, and the sea, beginning to waken too, sent a wave crashing up the beach with a sullen roar. Then an owl flew screeching out of the ivy beside her; and suddenly she fell forward on to the wet stone, with her head between her hands, like a tree when the axe cuts through the last inch of wood which kept it standing. For with an awful suddenness, like a spate coming down a river, or a hæmorrhage rushing from the lungs to the mouth, the truth was upon her, and she knew that if Gavin had loved her he would have been here long before this.

The grey light spread and brightened, until in the east a pale primrose glow coloured the sky. Starlings began to twitter in the shrubbery. The back door opened, and somebody walked with heavy feet across the yard. Her face was pressed convulsively against her bare arm, but through the red haze she saw Robin looking at her, with a smile half-masterful, half-teasing, on his lips, and entreaty in his eyes. . . . Betrayed, broken-hearted, destroyed . . . and before a year was past, she had been looking and longing for another.

O—O—O—how had she had the heart to do it. What would it have mattered what happened to her, so long as Robin got his heart's desire. If one heart must break—let it be hers. . . . One heart . . . one heart? But what if it had been two hearts? . . . If she had believed—if she had known that—Gavin . . . did not care—what would she have minded about herself. Gavin was not to blame. To blame? Who was there would dare to blame him! It was herself—Clytie, whom he had always loved in the old dear way, who had allowed this new love, this terrible unbearable love, to destroy everything. A feeling of scalding shame tingled through her body until it felt as if it was on fire. . . . It was because of this that Robin Le Mesurier lay in the Brocksden churchyard. The narrow coffin held his lean strong body; the body that rode and swam, and frightened her with its passionate embrace. He lay alone in the darkness, with the horrible little worms. . . .

Shuddering from head to foot and chilled to the bone, her face distorted with weeping, she pulled down the blind and crept back to her bed. She drew the clothes over her head, and seized the pillow in her teeth in her effort to restrain her sobs. . . . "Oh

Robin—Robin. . . . Oh Gavin! Eleven long months—and never to write me a word. . . . And it wasn't to be happy I wanted you . . . not to be happy, and forget . . . only to lie with my head on your knee, and your arms round me . . . and cry and cry."

8

"I am consairned to hear that Miss Clytie is still in her bed the day," said Sandy Macpherson, the gamekeeper, looking in through the kitchen door.

"Aye—she's lyin'," answered Maggie, "the lass" who for the last nine months had been at Standalone helping Kirstie.

"It will be a bad summer for the halth a' thegither. You wull have heard of the widow MacLachlan's eldest lass—about Miss Clytie's age she wull be, or may be a bit younger—spitting blood they say, and little hope of her living through the next winter——"

"There's naethin' the matter wi' Miss Clytie savin' a cauld she's gotten sittin' on the wet grass"—burst out Nanna, her voice rising almost to a skirl of indignation. "She's a hantel better sin' yesterday, an' she'll be up the morn gin it's a fine day." Stiffly she bent to lift the small brown teapot from the hob, set it upon a tray, and, glowering at the other servants, carried it from the kitchen.

They waited until her slow heavy steps were heard creaking along the landing above; then Sandy came over to where Maggie was shelling peas, and they began to talk in whispers.

"She never admits there's onythin' much the matter wi' Miss Clytie, though she's lain there those four days and hardly so much as notices if ye're in the room or no. But the auld buddy wull hae't she's stronger than maist. She snaps your heed aff ye gin ye say a wurrd to the contrary.—Look how quick she took me up when ye was speakin' of Moragh MacLachlan."

"I wonder Mistress Rutherford does not think o' havin' Dr. MacNab from Oban to our young lady"—said Sandy, greatly concerned.

"She says she has nae opeenion o' doctors—that them they finds bad they leaves waur. M'phm. And no sae muckle as a postcard has she sent to Miss Cameron tae tell her Miss Clytie's lyin'."

"Wall—that is a great mistake, whatefer. Miss Cameron is the person who should be here, there can be no doubt of it. She would have the doctor at once."

"A daresay there micht be little gude in't if she did, for A doot

she's no lang for this wurld. There's a look on her face reminds me o' my anty—her that deed o' cancer at Aberdeen."

A door above banged in the wind. They glanced nervously round, and drew nearer together.

"Folks are beginning to say"—said Sandy in a low tone—"that it wull be him that is drawing her . . . and that if he is calling her, she wull be bound to follow him."

Maggie paused with an unopened pod in her hand, and looked uneasily at him.

"Ye dinna believe siccan a tale as yon, Sandy Macpherson—that the dead can draw away the livin'?"

"It wuld be a harrd thing to say, but it looks very like. . . . She might have met him when she was out walking alone in the gloaming; and supposing she will have answered him when he spoke to her—which is very like, and him to have been her own husband if he had lived a day longer—she will be drawn to go to him, and no help for it whatefer."

"Hoots ava man! that an auld wife's tale——"

"Have you never heard tell of Sheila Macgregor and him that was drowned rounding Ardnamurchan Point—how she saw him coming up from the sea, and never knowing but that he was a living man she answered him, and it was not till he passed on that she heard the gurgling of the water in his throat and knew that she was a doomed woman. . . . You will have heard too of the story of the old laird of Ochentyre and Hamish MacNab. There are folk living yet who mind how Hamish dwined awa'. For my own part, if I have to be on the road by myself in the night-time, I aye turn into the wood or the field if I hear a body coming, and lie there till they are safely past."

Maggie's red cheeks were a little paler for this talk; for though like Nanna she hailed from Aberdeen, she had been long enough in service in the Highlands to have become influenced by the belief in the evil eye, second sight and the like, of all around her.

"It's a' havers," she murmured, in an uncertain tone, and bent over her bowl of peas again.

Sandy's arm began stealing insinuatingly round her waist, for though his hair was grizzled his ardour for the gentler sex was unabated, and Maggie was a comely wench in her way.

"Maggie woman—it's not the dead that a bonnie young lass like yourself need be afraid of at all at all. I am thinking there wuld be more peril to ye if ye met my living self on a lonely bit of the moor on a moonlight night, than from all the spirits in Morvern."

"Go along with you, Sandy Macpherson. I want nane o' your nonsense. I'm no taken up wi' ye at all, so ye needna think it."

Thus far Maggie; after which declaration of independence, she submitted to his caresses with apparent reluctance, but inward contentment. . . . The sound of Nanna descending the stairs sent them flying apart, Sandy to pick up the bowl of porridge for the dogs and vanish from the house, and Maggie to finish shelling her peas, with a heightened colour. In spite of increasing age and feebleness, Nanna's long standing in "the faimily," her autocratic temper, and her bitter tongue, still made her respected and feared by the servants at Standalone.

CHAPTER XI

NANNA

I

IT was a dull afternoon in the middle of July. A soft west wind moaned eerily round the walls of Standalone, and the windows were dimmed by a misty rain. Miss Maggie Cameron came briskly down the stairs with her Bible in her hand and her mackintosh on the top of her Sunday dress. She paused in the hall to button her gloves. Then, turning towards the passage which led to the kitchen, she called—"Rutherford!"

Her voice echoed away through the silent house. For a minute there was no response. Then, as she was about to call again, the kitchen door opened, and Nanna, with a somewhat dour expression on her face, came slowly along the passage towards her.

"O—Rutherford, I am sorry to disturb you, but I must be going now or I shall be late for the service. Please go up and sit with Miss Clytie while I am away. She seems rather low this evening, and I hardly like leaving her. But she was so anxious that I should go, and perhaps you may be able to cheer her up."

Glancing at the clock, she moved across the hall and took her umbrella from the stand. At the outer door she stopped to say—"And please see that she takes her tumbler of milk at seven. I shall not be back till nearly eight," and nodding pleasantly she went out.

In a grim silence, and with compressed lips, Nanna watched her walking away across the wet gravel. Then, turning towards the stairs, she muttered—"See that she taks her milk as I'll no be back in time'. A buddy wud think the bairn was clean negleckit when Miss Cameron isna here tae see t' her! But, tae my way o' thinkin', we was gettin' on fine wi'oot her, an' she had nae call to come back here frae Glesky when the doctor was weel content wi' *my* nurrsin', an' Miss Clytie gettin' ower the fever as weel as cud be expeckit. Aye . . . an' a' this fussin' aboot milk here an'

physic there is just throwin' the bairn back an' worryin' her oot o' her senses forbye. A' she needs now is gude wholesome food, an' tae be left tae hersel, no to hae company aye forced upon her when she has nae mind for't! Gin Miss Cameron wud only hae the nouse tae gang back to her sister in Glesky, we'd hae Miss Clytie up an' aboot again afore we kenned where we was."

Soliloquising thus, she mounted the stairs, and going along the passage to the door of the big double bedroom paused, and knocked. There was no response from within, so she turned the handle and went in. A fire of fir logs burnt on the hearth, and Clytie was lying on a sofa near the window, through which she was staring out across the moors with blank indifferent eyes. At the sight of her, Nanna's harsh features were softened by the yearning yet timid affection of one who had of late been too often rebuffed.—"Wud ye care for me to come ben an' keep ye company for a while, ma bairn, or wud ye rather bide by yoursel," she asked softly.

At the sound of her approach Clytie had glanced round, then turned her face away again. "I'd rather be alone for a bit—thank you," she muttered. But as the old servant, without a word of protest, turned to go out, she raised herself on her elbow, and cried—"Nanna—come back. Shut the door, and come and sit beside me . . . O Nanna—what shall I do? She never leaves me alone, not for five minutes. She's always with me now . . . and I can't bear it. I don't want anybody with me, now, except you. I'll never get well, never, unless she goes away—but how can I tell her to go, after all her kindness to me? But—if she doesn't go soon—I believe I'll go off my head. O Nanna, help me. Tell me what I can do."

Her eyes were wild, her speech rapid, almost incoherent. She was sitting up and grasping Nanna's hand. Glancing uneasily at her flushed cheeks, for she was ever fearful of a return of the fever, the old nurse answered in a soothing tone—

"Never fash yoursel, hinny. Never fash yoursel. Say but the wurd, an' I'll get rid o' her this verra week, wi'oot ony tribble tae ye whatever."

"No, no—we can't—you can't tell her I don't want her here, after all she's done for me. I couldn't bear you to do that!" Clytie burst into excited tears. "Besides, she wouldn't go. She's made up her mind to stop here until Donald comes, and that's in September. . . . He'll be here with his wife in September, Nanna, and where can I go to then?"

Nanna's attitude stiffened with indignation.

"He wud never think tae turrr ye oot o' your ain hame, an' you his father's ae dochter!"

"Oh, no. He's very kind. He's written . . . I had a letter from him yesterday. He says I must stay on here with them when they come, but I couldn't do that, Nanna. Poor things, they're only just married. It would be horrid for them to have me in the house, spoiling everything. No, I'll have to find somewhere to go to before they come . . . but where? I don't know where. There doesn't seem any place left in the world for me now."

An immense satisfaction was filling Nanna's heart, that, after the silence, almost estrangement of the past months, her bairn had turned to her again, and was pouring forth her sorrows as in the old childish days. In silence, save for a murmur of—"Wheest now, ma dearie. Hush ye, hush ye"—she waited until the height of the flood had passed and Clytie's voice had died away into an occasional broken exclamation. Her tear-stained face was hidden in her old nurse's lap. Her tears still flowed, but more quietly, soothed by the gentle monotonous stroking of the old hand.

"An' gin ye want to come awa an' hae a place o' your ain, wi' me to do for ye, what should prevent ye, hinny?" Nanna's voice sounded ten years younger, so full was it of contentment and pride. "There's yon cottage o' Mistress Macpherson's—the cottage on the shore, I mean. It's stood empty those twa years now. . . . Bide a wee, tho. Didna I hear tell at twa English leddies was speerin' after it, wantin' tae come there in the summer like. But ye may be cairtain, Mistress Macpherson wud liefer let it tae kent folk like oorsels, than to them."

Clytie had raised her head with a faint flicker of hope dawning in her eyes.—"Yes. I remember the cottage of course, where you used to take me to have tea with old Miss Macnab," she murmured. "It's right down on the shore, and there's a wood behind it, and a garden in front—and it's furnished. It would just do for us, Nanna, and Cousin Maggie couldn't follow us there; it's too small. If only I could see Mrs. Macpherson about it . . . but I can't walk there, and if I tried to go in the cart Cousin Maggie would be sure to find out and stop me. . . . What can we do about it, Nanna? If we don't see about it at once, those other people will get it!"

She was pacing up and down the room, almost wringing her hands in the pitiable agitation into which any difficulty throws the convalescent.

Nanna said—

"Come awa back tae your sofy this meenut. There's nae deefi-

culty aboot it at a'. Miss Cameron canna hinner *me* gae'n whaur I wull, can she? I'll awa in the cairt the morn, come rain come fine, an' we'll hae the whole maitter settled afore ye can say 'wanderin' Wullie'!"

2

The wind and the rain had been succeeded by a morning of radiant sunshine. The braes were as green as the kirtle of the fairy queen, and the grass was embroidered with flowers, yellow tormentills and birdsfoot, the bright blue of 'he milkwort and the speedwell, the purple scabious, the low-growing red rattle and the tiny white eyebright. Nanna's black elastic-sided boots crushed the flowers as she tramped along by the side of the road, her best stuff skirt turned up and pinned back carefully above her short, checked petticoat, her bonnet strings untied, her face flushed with the unwonted exertion, but also with triumph, for she had accomplished her mission successfully and got the first refusal of the cottage from Mrs. Macpherson. Uplifted by an intense satisfaction in this achievement, she paid little heed to the beauty of the scene but continued to advance at a very creditable pace for a woman of eighty, whose life had been mainly spent indoors.* In her impatience to carry the good news to Clytie, she had not waited for the farm cart, which had dropped her at the lodge gates of Nochdrinn in the morning, to return and pick her up on its way home, but had set off on foot alone. It was over four miles back to Standalone, but if it proved too much for her she could always rest by the road side until the cart came along.

So far so good: but presently the sight of a grassy track running off to the right across the moor, suggested to her a more adventurous though less prudent plan. It was the short cut to the cottage, and what an added triumph would it be if she could inspect it this very day, and so be able to describe it in detail to Clytie, when she got home. At this thought the premonitory achings of fatigue in her back and legs were all forgotten. It was years since she had been to the cottage, not since Clytie was a child, indeed: but she remembered the path perfectly, and that the cottage lay barely a mile beyond the road. Once there, she could rest an hour or so until the heat had abated, and then walk home at her leisure along the high grasslands above the shore. If she could rouse one gleam of interest in her bairn's face, the extra mile would be well worth while.

The track led her at first over level ground, and she went along it blithely, resting from time to time, and pleasing herself by

picking a small bunch of bell heather, clumps of which grew on either hand. Presently, however, her way ran down hill through marshy ground, at first gay with pink and purple orchises, and then with bog asphodels which raised their slender golden heads in every space not already taken up by the squat grey-green bushes of the bog-myrtle. The soles of Nanna's boots began to slither and stick in the mud, for she lacked the agility to stride from tussock to tussock of grass.

It was now two o'clock, for she had left Nochdrinn immediately after the servants' twelve o'clock dinner. The sun, shining almost directly down upon her, beat through her thin black bonnet, making her head throb and ache in an unpleasant and confusing manner. Making the best speed she could, she ascended another rise from the top of which it should have been possible to see the chimney stack of the cottage rising above the trees; but a red haze floated before Nanna's eyes, and her spectacles were dimmed with perspiration so that she could only see a few yards in front of her. The violent beating of her heart compelled her to sit down upon a rock, but, unwilling to rest here for long in the full glare of the sun, and anxious to reach the shade of the hazel coppice, she went on again as soon as she was able to do so, with a feeble wavering gait which made her progress hardly faster than that of the slow-worms which wriggled away into the bracken at her approach. After what seemed to her an eternity of effort, she reached the coppice, and fell rather than sat down upon the mossy bank, where she lay for a time, sunk in a coma of exhaustion.

Had it been possible now to retrace her steps to the road and there await the cart, she would have done so; but she realised that to climb the hill again was beyond her powers, and that her only chance of getting home was to reach the cottage, where a prolonged rest might give her strength for the onward journey.

Although it was cool to the point of chilliness in the shade of the hazel trees, the air was filled with a host of midges whose eager and venomous onslaught upon her face and hands plagued her beyond endurance. She staggered to her feet again, and with tears for the first time welling out of her eyes and rolling down her withered face which was now flushed to a deep purple, she tottered on. Again the sun beat down on her defenceless head, seeming as though it must dissolve her brain with its relentless, probing rays. Then again the shade of the trees protected her, and this time she was unconscious of the innumerable pin prickings of the midges, unconscious too of the protruding roots and rocks upon the path over which she stumbled incessantly. Her

eyes, in which the flickering light of semi-delirium had begun to appear, were fixed upon a little child, with red hair and merry wilful black eyes, who seemed to trip along the path before her, turning from time to time to laugh back at her and beckon her on. "Dinna run on too far ahead o' me, ma bairn. Bide a wee till I come, an' I'll tak ye doon tae the sea," she tried to call to it, but no sound issued from her swollen lips. . . . Then suddenly she came with painful force against a wooden paling, and saw on the other side of it a neglected strip of garden wherein ragworts and cow-parsnips grew in wild luxuriance. The child had vanished; the red haze which had been closing in on her, had lifted; and there, not ten yards away, stood the cottage for which she was seeking. Buoyed up by new hope at the sight, she pushed open the little gate, passed up the gravel path, and steadying herself against the door on which the paint was rising in great sun blisters, fumbled blindly for the handle. It turned readily enough, but the door remained closed. It was locked.

She remained there motionless, leaning against the door-post, while her heart, now pumped with a furious energy which sent wave after wave of blood rushing to her head, now sank to a feeble intermittent fluttering. At last the catastrophic nature of the emergency, under which a feebler spirit might well have collapsed, served to rally her wandering senses. Instinctively aware that she must perish unless she could get into the coolness of the cottage and bathe her head in cold water, she began methodically to encircle it, pausing at each window to see if it had perchance been left unbolted. But all were closed and shuttered except the scullery window which had bars, through which her dim eyes caught a glimpse of taps and sink mocking her with their promise of life-preserving water. It was not until she had arrived at the back of the house and her courage had well-nigh failed her on finding the kitchen door also bolted, that she at last perceived that the window on to the staircase was a few inches open, being held in that position by a piece of wood inserted between the sill and the sash. It was some ten feet from the ground, but directly beneath it stood the rain-water barrel of the cottage. For even a moderately active person it would have been a comparatively simple matter to reach the window by this means, but for Nanna it seemed a physical impossibility. Her rheumy eyes, inflamed by the heat, gazed up at it, then fixed themselves upon the ground with the resignation of despair.

Presently, in the confusion of mind into which this last blow had cast her, she began to imagine her own craving need of water

LOVE IN A MIST

to be the importunate clamouring of a child for a drink upon a hot day. The little creature which she had seen in the wood seemed to stand by her again, plucking at her skirt and wailing—"I want a drink—I want a drink"—Rousing herself from the stupor into which she was sinking, she looked round for something to assist her to mount on to the barrel. Her eyes fell upon a small wooden *cuddey* of the kind which country folk use when they saw up the branches which they have carried in from the wood. "Hae a little patience, I'll fetch ye a drop water in a meenut," she whispered; and throwing her weight against it, with immense labour, inch by inch, she shoved the *cuddey* before her until it stood against the water barrel.

To step from the ground on to the lowest cross bar of the *cuddey* was an easy matter, but it was only after a desperate struggle that she succeeded in climbing thence on to the cover of the barrel, and she was so faint with the effort that she was obliged to lean for support against the rough harled wall of the house. The worst was still to come, for an ascent of some three feet remained between the barrel and the window. Drawing a deep breath she grasped the window-sill with gnarled, tenacious fingers, wedged her square-toed boot into a chink in the wall, and with a supreme effort succeeded in raising herself until she knelt with one knee upon the window ledge. For a moment she clung there, a frail indomitable figure, fit symbol for the unconquerable spirit of humanity. Then the tense fingers suddenly relaxed. Her head with its black bonnet still perched crookedly upon her thin grey hair, swung backwards. She crashed on to the ground, and lay there, like a broken vessel, with the bell heather which she had fastened in the bosom of her dress to take home to Clytie, lying scattered about her.

3

From where she lay upon a plaid on the heather a little way above the house, Clytie could see the sea spread out beneath her like a sheet of satin, with Mull wrapped in a thin blue haze, while on the horizon, by some effect of mirage, the Islands appeared to be floating in the sky a foot above the water. The sun had travelled more than half the distance of his downward course and a gentle evening breeze was stirring the leaves of the birch trees, but as yet Clytie heard no approaching rumble of the cart, bringing Nanna home. Knowing that it had been obliged to go on some way beyond Nochdrinn, however, to carry meal to an outlying shepherd's hut, she felt no anxiety, and but little impatience, since

it was better for Nanna to have rested at Nochdrinn till evening than to have driven home through the sultry heat of the afternoon.

She lay, looking along the Morvern shore and trying to make out which promontory hid the cottage in which she and Nanna would live together through winter, spring and summer of the years to come. It was right down on the shore, she remembered. The sea was so near it that, in the equinoctial gales, the spray sometimes left a film of salt upon the windows. In May the little wood behind it was blue with wild hyacinths. . . . She would work in the garden, and look after Nanna, and be happy . . . —“he happy”—she repeated with resolution, but even as she said it the tears rolled down her cheeks. Hearing a step approaching she hurriedly brushed them away. . . . It was Miss Cameron, who had been called into the house a quarter of an hour before.

“Clytie, dear child, come up to your room. It is growing chilly.—Come dear.”

Her manner was strange, and as they crossed the gravel she suddenly put her arm round Clytie’s waist, and pressed it. Clytie felt a pang of remorse at the unexpected caress, for in such ways her cousin was undemonstrative. Rather shyly she murmured, —“Dear Cousin Maggie”.

Miss Cameron shut the door of the bedroom, went over to the fireplace, and stood looking down at the unlit logs. Without turning round, she asked, “Clytie—did you know that old nurse had gone over to Nochdrinn to-day?”

Clytie’s face flushed a deep red. In confusion she answered, “Yes, Cousin Maggie. I know. She had to see Mrs. Macpherson about something. She went in the cart. It should be back any minute now.”

Miss Cameron walked over to the window and nervously pulled up the blind. A stream of sunshine rushed into the room, and she drew it down again immediately. —“She is not coming back in the cart. . . . I have heard from Mrs. Macpherson. She is bringing her home in the carriage. . . . Dear old nurse is ill. She is very seriously ill.—You must try to be brave, dear Clytie.”

Clytie, who had stood listening with parted lips and rigid face, turned without a word and began hurrying towards the door; but a sudden faintness made her stagger and catch at a chair. “The doctor”—she cried, her voice harsh with her effort to speak plainly: “The doctor must be sent for at once. If Sandy goes on his bicycle—O Cousin Maggie! send Kirstie running to his cottage. Say he must go immediately.”

Miss Cameron left the room, and Clytie leant back for a

moment with closed eyes, then sprang to her feet, went to the bed, and turned it back. This done, she mounted with difficulty to Nanna's attic, found her flannel nightgown and frilled nightcap, and carried them down to her own room. She was just stooping over the fire to put a match to it when, looking up, she saw Miss Cameron standing silently beside her.

"Has he gone? This room is quite ready. They must bring her up here."

"I—I did not tell Sandy to go, Clytie. Because——"

"I'll go down myself." Clytie's voice was like steel.

"Clytie—wait. Dear child. . . . I hardly know how to tell you. I hoped, if I left you for a little, you might——" Miss Cameron paused, in great distress. Then, taking her in her arms, she whispered, "—Our dear old nurse has—left us, Clytie."

"Nanna? Nanna! I don't believe it!" cried Clytie in a high fierce voice. She thrust her cousin away, then suddenly wrung her hands and burst into tears. "I *can't* believe it! She was perfectly well when she started this morning. It's not true!—*Say* it isn't true, Cousin Maggie."

"Could you bear to read Mrs. Macpherson's letter?"

The sheet of paper shook so in her hand that she could only make out a sentence here and there. . . . "Set off walking in the heat. . . . The keeper found her lying by the Shore cottage . . . tried everything, but life was quite extinct. . . . Probably heat apoplexy . . . a terrible shock for poor Clytie. . . ." Nanna was *dead*.

She became presently conscious that her hand was held, and that Miss Cameron's voice, trembling with sympathy, was murmuring: "She rests in the Lord, Clytie. I think she was ready to go. . . . A long life of willing devotion to duty. To her indeed it may be said, 'Well done good and faithful servant'."

Clytie walked over to the window and leant her head against the shutter. Presently, speaking with difficulty, she said—"Please go away."

"I will, dear, I will. . . . Later on, perhaps you could eat something? . . . or, at least a glass of milk——"

Receiving no answer, she hovered distressfully in the doorway for a minute; then, going softly out, closed the door behind her.

It was two hours now since the sound of heavy feet on the stairs had drawn her out into the passage, to see the Nochdrinn coach-

man and Sandy labouring upwards carrying between them a small stiff figure covered by a shawl, followed by Miss Cameron and Kirstie, while Maggie wept loudly in the hall. She had tried to follow them, but Cousin Maggie had prevented her. "No dear, no. Better to remember her as she was," she had pleaded, and led her back into her room.

For a long time now the stealthy rustling movements on the floor above had ceased, and the house had sunk into a sombre silence. At last Clytie rose from the bed on which she had been lying face downwards, and began to undress. As she did so, she thought with dry eyes of the many times that Nanna had helped her, holding her nightgown to the fire to warm, brushing her hair, tucking her up in bed. Standing there alone in the wan grey light of the short Highland night, she remembered—long, long ago—waking suddenly in terror to find darkness around her, and screaming "Nanna!" and the instant sound of feet hurrying up the stairs, the exquisite comfort and relief of snuggling her nose into Nanna's black dress and hearing her scolding yet consoling voice.

The sound of voices whispering below, then of approaching feet, sent her quickly into bed. The door opened. Miss Cameron entered with a glass of milk in her hand. "Clytie dear—Clytie!" she said, peering towards the bed; then, after a pause, added in a whisper, "Thank God! she is asleep". Setting the milk down on the table, and tiptoeing across the floor to close the curtains, she went softly away into her own room. . . . *All this had happened before* . . . the same dark room; the same pretending to be asleep; the same—no, not the same—for then it had been Nanna, darling old Nanna coming in and speaking to her, the night before her wedding day—ha! ha! ha! *not* her wedding day—not her wedding day—say, rather, the night before Robin killed himself!

Controlling herself with a great effort, she lay motionless listening to the sound of Miss Cameron moving about in the next room. The wardrobe door creaked as she put away her dress. Then came a splashing sound, for she always had a bath in her room at night. . . . A bath? A white bath of scented water—half a bottle of eau-de-Cologne, emptied into it by Nanna's shaking hands, because it was her bairn's wedding day.

Not a sound in the dressing-room now. Could she be already in bed. No, she was only saying her prayers.—"O you brute—you brute! To let her die alone on the shore—all alone, alone on the shore. Do what you like now. I'll *never* pray to you again." Hush! be quiet. Cousin Maggie might hear. . . . What long

prayers they were. How would they go? "We thank Thee for creation, preservation and all the blessings of this life." . . . Ah, she had finished now. She always gave that little groan as she rose from her knees, because of her rheumatism. The light under the door went out. After a considerable interval the sound of gentle regular snoring showed that she was asleep.

Alone, at last. Alone. . . . Nanna, dying in the sunshine, alone. . . . The clock in the passage caught up the refrain and ticked "A-lone-a-lone-a-lone". . . . This morning she had believed herself unhappy, yet Nanna had been alive and well, setting off full of joy and importance—on Clytie's errand. Nanna had needed so little to make her happy, only to be allowed to be with Clytie. Never once in all those years had she consented to go for a holiday away from her—but now she had set off on that last, longest journey, without even saying good-bye to her. . . . In all the world there had been just two people who loved her, Nanna, and—Robin . . . and she had destroyed them both. So now, there was nobody left, nobody. . . . Even as she told herself this, a face seemed to be looking at her out of the darkness. Pressing her fingers before her eyes she tried to shut it out, and realised that it was not in the darkness at all, but inside her soul. A voice within her savagely cried—"I may have loved you, once. I did. I know I did. . . . But now, I hate you—yes, I hate you!" Tears gushed from her eyes. For a moment she wildly tore her hair. Then, in a voice broken with sobs she murmured—"Not true—not true . . . Gavin, Gavin—I'll always love you, darling—always".

The flood of emotion ebbed and passed away, leaving behind it an arid desolation like the boulder-strewn sun-parched bed of an Eastern torrent. Her soul fainted with a nausea of life. She saw it, stretching away before her in an unending monotony of wretched days. . . . Even so must it have appeared to Robin, on that last night. . . . *How* had Robin done it? They had never told her, and until now she had shrunk away in horror from the thought of it. . . . Probably he had used his revolver. But she had not even a knife. . . . What if she went down to the sea and swam out and out, till she could swim no more? No. That would take too long. What she had to do must be done in this room, now, this very night.

As she made this resolve, she was in a moment transported to the turret room at Brocksden, was sitting on the rug by the fire with her arms wound round her knees, while a voice behind her read aloud—

This ae nicht, this ae nicht,
Every night and all.
Fire and sleet and candle light
And Christ receive thy soul.

Closing her eyes, she prayed silently. "O Christ—I was wrong to think it was your fault. God and You have had nothing to do with it. . . . But, *don't* receive my soul. I implore You not to receive it. Just forget that You ever made me, and let me go out like a candle."

Softly she got out of bed and, with the utmost precaution, opened the door which led into her cousin's room. For a moment she stood listening intently. The gentle snoring sound which she had heard earlier was still going on. Noiselessly her naked feet stole past the bed and over to the washing-stand. There was a long pause, while her hand groped about here and there, along the shelf and behind the basin, until it came against a bottle upon which it closed like a vice. Was this it? Staring down, in the dim light she seemed to discern the red label marked *Poison*. She drew out the cork and smiled as she recognised the bitter pungent smell. Holding it tightly, she stole back again to her own room, locking the door after her. . . . A passionate desire seized her to toss it off and get the business over. She raised it to her mouth and tilted back her head. But in spite of herself her lips instinctively closed. She remained there, motionless, her heart beating so violently that it seemed to reverberate through the whole house.

O God! would it do its work quickly—or would she have to wait? No. Not that. It was so strong—when Cousin Maggie rubbed it on her knee she said it blistered it—the pains would be upon her almost at once. . . . Horrible pains—yes. But not too bad for a person who had murdered two people. . . . And then—Oh gentle death. Oh kindly, silent death. A little while ago it would have been a sin, but now, nobody would really care. With a bitter smile she repeated—"Nobody will care".

A slight sound, almost like a sigh, beside her in the darkness, made her start violently. The door was locked. How could anybody have got in? Trembling, she looked behind her and around. No. There was nobody. It had been only imagination. But it was possible that at any moment Cousin Maggie might waken and force her way in! With an abrupt movement she again put the bottle to her lips, gripping it between her teeth, and raising her hand until, with a low gurgling sound, the liquid began to flow towards her mouth.

Merciful God! there it was again! The hair rose upon her

head. Aghast she stared in the direction from which that sound had come, that sigh—that heavy, sorrowful sigh. Thrusting out her hand, she attempted to grasp the thing—whatever it might be—but found nothing. Her straining eyes saw only the looming shapes of the furniture and dim grey square of the window: yet, against the evidence of sight and touch, she knew with a terrified anguish and tenderness that the spirit of Nanna was standing beside her.

Throwing wide her arms she tried this time to embrace the darkness; but whatever had been there was gone.—“Wait, Nanna. Wait for me! I am coming too”—she cried. . . . For a minute there was a profound silence in the room. . . . Then came a crash of breaking glass, and the sound of a body falling heavily to the ground.

CHAPTER XII

GAVIN AND LADY CECILY

THE afternoon train came into the little station of Lamerton in a blatter of rain, and the one first-class passenger who descended from it hastened to the shelter of the carriage which was waiting for him. Two or three farmers drove off in their gigs, and the rest of the passengers scattered in the direction of the village. One traveller only, having left his bag at the booking-office, turned in the contrary direction, and with his collar turned up to protect him from the driving rain set off down the muddy high-road. Mist hung over the woods, and water dripped from the roofs of the farm cottages as he passed by. There was nobody about, the rain having driven even the hinds indoors. He walked at a swinging pace, and milestone succeeded milestone until at a certain point he left the highway, and vaulting a gate turned into a woodland path which presently led him into the Brocksden back avenue.

The rain had now slackened to a light drizzle, and the air was filled with that indescribable country smell which is compounded of wet earth and grass, meadowsweet, rotting leaves and honey-suckle. In the rough grass by the side of the avenue the London pride was in full flower, every creamy-pink petal being at this moment adorned by a diamond of rain. At the foot of the brae the Adder, undisturbed by the summer shower, caressed its mossy stones with an amorous murmur.

Presently the avenue began to ascend gently, and trim grass verges appeared on either side of it. Then Brocksden came into sight, dignified and imposing, with the old peel tower clinging to its side like the beggar maid and King Cophetua. It was now that the pace at which he had covered the five miles seemed for the first time to tell upon the solitary pedestrian. His face flushed and his breath came unevenly. He paused to turn down his collar and put on his hat which he had been carrying in his hand. Then he walked slowly on, crossed the gravel, and went up the front-door steps.

The bell jangled loudly echoing through the quiet house. After a brief interval a footman appeared.

"Is Sir Peter at home?"

"Not at 'ome, sir."

"Is Miss Clytie in—Miss MacLeod?"

"Miss MacLeod, sir? Miss MacLeod has not been staying here for a long time."

"She is not staying here?"

"No sir."

There was a pause during which the footman, having time to scan the unknown gentleman and note his very old Burberry and muddy boots, became filled with doubts as to whether he was indeed a gentleman, or a commercial traveller touting the goods for some firm like the one he had shown into the drawing-room on a previous occasion, and received scorching censure from Mr. Pretty for so doing. His doubts were increased by an abrupt demand for Miss Clytie's present address.

"I really couldn't say where Miss MacLeod is residing now," he answered loftily.

"Isn't Pretty in? Ask him to come here, will you"—said the stranger with some irritation. But it seemed Mr. Pretty had gone to Edinburgh with Sir Peter.

"Has her ladyship gone to Edinburgh too?" inquired the unknown gentleman after another pause during which he had stared hard at the ground with a thoughtful scowl on his face. The answer to this was easy. Her ladyship was at home, but at the same time she was not at home, she was resting.

"Well"—The gentleman felt in his pockets and produced a card upon which he wrote a few words. "Give this to Lady Cecily, please," he said.

The footman took the card, and after hesitating a second between the advisability of showing the stranger into the drawing-room or leaving him in the porch, chose the middle course of inviting him to take a seat in the hall. Then he departed, pausing when out of sight to read the card, on which was printed "Gavin Buchan," with "Just back from India. Can I see you" written in pencil at the top.

It would have seemed strange indeed five years ago to be kept waiting like this in the well-known hall; but at this moment Gavin was conscious of nothing except his overwhelming sensation of disappointment. Never, since he had left Lahore by the Bombay mail, had he doubted that his journey would end at Brocksden, and that here he would find her in search of whom he had crossed the

seas. It had been stupid of him of course. A dozen things might have occurred to take her away from home. But the servant had hardly seemed to know who she was, and it seemed she had not been living at Brocksden for a long time. Could she have gone to Standalone? But Standalone was always let. Where had she gone to? What had become of her?

He paced up and down the hall, devoured by anxiety, until the footman returned and in an apologetic manner begged him to come up to the drawing-room: her ladyship would be down directly. He seemed to wait there for interminable minutes however, his eyes resting on the familiar furniture without seeing anything, not even the Raeburn of which he had always been so fond, before the door opened and a fat pug rushed through it and barked at him. ¹⁸⁷⁴rustle of silk followed, and Lady Cecily was in the room.

In spite of his complete absorption in the end for which he had come, he was startled into a momentary forgetfulness of it by the change in her appearance. Her smiling gracious elegance, that happy conviction of being a charming lady in a satisfactory world which had seemed to encircle her like an aura only a year ago, was all gone. Her hair was arranged in the old elaborate manner, but its colour had faded, and the curled Victorian fringe was quite grey. Below it was a face sunken and sallow, with a nervous and irritable expression in the eyes and lines of disillusionment about the mouth. She greeted him with a rather formal kindness, regretted Sir Peter's absence, and ordered tea to be brought. They sat down, and for nearly an hour talked of Johnnie, his improved appearance, his rowing at Eton and his approaching career at Oxford.

As the conversation went on Lady Cecily's manner gradually changed from coldness to cordiality. The disagreeable suspicion which Gavin's unexpected appearance had roused in her was laid at rest, and it was with a near approach to her old kind manner that, after tea, she took up her embroidery and said—"And how are you getting on in India, Mr. Buchan?"

Gavin was leaning forward, his hands clasped between his knees, his eyes fixed upon the fire. Without answering her question he said in a low voice—"Lady Cecily—will you tell me where Clytie is?"

Lady Cecily's face stiffened. The hand which was drawing the ribbon through her embroidery began to tremble. For a moment she returned no answer, and he almost feared she was going to burst into tears. . . . "I fancy she is abroad at present with her cousin Miss Cameron," she said at last; and there was a chill in her

voice and a dryness which suggested that an indelicate subject might now be dropped.

"Will you give me her address, please," said Gavin looking earnestly at her. "I want to—go and see her."

"I am afraid I do not know it."

"I have come home, only to see her," said Gavin. "I only heard what had happened, three weeks ago.—I heard it quite by chance from a man in Le Mesurier's regiment who was up in Kashmir. All this time I thought she was married to him." His voice was not quite steady. He waited a minute, then looked again with a steady appeal in his eyes at Lady Cecily, who, however, refused to meet his gaze and seemed absorbed in her embroidery. "I came home by the next boat," said Gavin.

After a slight pause, Lady Cecily asked in a tone of conventional politeness—"And how did you find Mrs. Buchan? quite well I hope?"

Gavin's mother had been dead those seven months, but he answered "Yes, thank you," and there was another silence.

"Lady Cecily," said Gavin at last: "I think you know why I want to see Clytie." . . . The complete unresponsiveness of the face opposite made his own harden. Breathing rather quickly, and speaking with an effort, he went on—"I *must* see her wherever she is. I've come home to ask her to be my wife. . . . If you really do not know where she is, surely you can tell me how to get her address."

"I am afraid I cannot help you," repeated Lady Cecily.

When she had said this a silence fell upon the room, a silence which every minute became more oppressive with its burden of conflicting wills. Lady Cecily was still embroidering, but the emotions which were sweeping through her contradicted the enforced composure of her attitude. . . . To have Clytie throw over a man like Captain Le Mesurier—in such a manner—and with *such* results—and then marry her cousin's old tutor! Such a conclusion would indeed put the finishing touch to the scandal. Never would she assist in such a mésalliance. She was amazed that he should have the effrontery to ask her to do such a thing. Why, but for him this disaster, this tragedy would never have taken place. Clytie would have married Captain Le Mesurier, and all would have been different. . . . No vision of a young tear-stained face, and a voice choked with sobs, entreating "Oh Aunt Cecily, help me—because I am so very, very miserable," flitted through her memory to soften her resolution. Her indignation increased every minute. Had custom permitted she would have risen to her

feet and dismissed him. As it was, she felt obliged to wait until he had the grace to go. But this he appeared to have no intention of doing. There was something at once compelling and even alarming in his complete immobility, and the manner in which his eyes remained fixed upon her averted face. . . . She turned her embroidery over and began snipping off the ends with a sharp clicking noise. . . . She moved restlessly in her seat. An immense fatigue had taken possession of her. Nothing seemed any longer worth contending for. If she yielded, he would go, and leave her at peace. She gave one last despairing struggle to hold tightly to her resolution. Then, in a voice which was faint and cold, she murmured—

“I am uncertain whether Miss Cameron and—my niece—have gone abroad as was intended, or whether they are still at Stand-alone. My niece has been unwell lately, and I imagine is not yet sufficiently recovered to be moved.”

Gavin's attitude relaxed. He drew a long breath, and rose to his feet.

“Thank you, Lady Cecily. I am very grateful to you. Good-bye,” he said; and his eyes, compassionate and gentle once more, met hers as they shook hands.

CHAPTER XIII

IN THE MIST

I saw my Jauchie ghaist—I couldna think it he,
Till he said, "An come hame, my love, tae marry thee".
—"Auld Robin Gray"

UN the path across the hills which he had chosen to go by rather than follow the winding road along the shore, the mist was so thick that it was only from his watch showing him to have been walking three hours that he believed himself to be approaching Standalone. From time to time he paused, and peered through the mist, looking for the high-road which he should have struck long before this; but there was no sign of it. Almost he regretted having left the steamer at Lochalin, but at the time he had seemed no choice in the matter, since the captain had told him that, if it grew any thicker, it would be impossible to put in at Standalone bay. . . . Ten miles, they had said it was, by the moor path from Lochalin to Standalone village; and he had been walking at least four and a half miles an hour. Was it possible he had gone wrong anywhere? No. The path had been fairly well trodden and he had followed it all the way. If he did not reach the road soon, however, he would follow the next burn down to the sea. By keeping along the shore he must come to Standalone at last, unless indeed he had already passed beyond it in the mist. This unpleasant doubt had hardly crossed his mind, when a cold wind sprang up and the mist was cleft in two, revealing a bog on either hand, but in front of him a little hill with a patch of green on its head wherein he could dimly perceive figures in motion. These must be crofters working in a field. He would be able to put him on the right way. Without hesitating he left the track and set off at a pace so rapid as to be almost across the bog towards them. The little figures, all gathered at one spot, seemed curiously black, like ants against the green. What could they be doing? he wondered. When, as the mist rose higher, he realised that the

white and grey objects around them which had been subconsciously puzzling him were not sheep but tombstones, that the green patch was a graveyard, and that a funeral was going on. Even as he thought this, the group round the unseen grave stirred and broke up, and the tiny black figures began, in twos and threes, to depart over the shoulder of the hill. If he quickened his pace he would still find the diggers there, filling in the grave. Breaking into a run he plunged downhill, sinking ankle deep in bog, or wading through bracken up to his waist.

As suddenly as it had come, the wind dropped, and the mist closed in again, narrowing his vision to a circle of dripping heather and fern, with an occasional strip of hazel bushes looming uncannily large through the white obscurity. He pressed on, keeping his eyes fixed on that point where the mist had hidden the mourners. The ground sloped down into bog, and rose to heather, but he turned to the graveyard; and, presently, something familiar in the appearance of a boulder with a red-berried clump of St. John's wort growing at its foot roused in him the suspicion that he had been walking in a circle. . . . O for a pocket compass and map! but he had neither, so—as it was clearly useless to trust to his sense of direction, he must give up trying to reach the graveyard, and return to his earlier, surer plan of letting a burn guide him.

He tramped on again for what seemed an eternity, but never a burn crossed his track. From time to time he put up his hand and wiped the perspiration from his forehead. This aimless wandering to and fro in the mist was becoming a nightmare to him. To have spent hours walking in circles upon this cursed moor, while that she for lack of whom his heart had been aching every minute of this past year was only a few miles away from him, was the sorriest jest of the ironic gods. Was Fate, which had kept them asunder so long, hazarding everything in this last throw? Setting his teeth he strode on again, but a curious heaviness had fallen upon his spirits which he tried in vain to shake off.

An opaque object suddenly bisected the mist before him. It was a stone dyke, and on the other side of it he saw the grey shapes of tombstones rising from the grass. . . . The gods were good after all! It was the graveyard. Leaping on to the dyke, he perceived about thirty yards away an obelisk of grey granite which reared its head high above the humbler tombstones. He seemed to remember that it was near this imposing monument of death that the mourners had gathered. He sprang down and, stumbling now and again in his eager speed over some tombstone which in the

passage of time had fallen down or sunk deeply into the earth, he made his way towards it. Low iron railings enclosed a square of grass which, unlike the rest of the graveyard, was trim and well kept. The sexton had done his work, and gone, for at one side of it lay the deserted grave, wet brown earth against the wet grass, with wreaths of heather and of white roses arranged on it. The feeling of foreboding which had oppressed him on the moor, took possession of him again. Something impelled him to turn and read the names engraved upon the base of the monument . . . "Donald MacLeod of Standalone . . . Grizel Campbell, beloved wife of Donald MacLeod . . . Donald MacLeod of Standalone son of the above, 1839-1884"—Clytie's father! . . . The burial ground of the MacLeods of Standalone! . . . Then, whose—*whose* was this new-made grave?

For a minute he remained standing there like a figure turned to stone. Then he began running towards the graveyard gate, which was near-by, and along the road which led down the hill, like one pursued by the furies . . . To Standalone—to Standalone. He would learn the truth at Standalone.

As the shoulder of the hill dropped precipitately towards the sea, the cart road went down it in a series of wide curves. Gavin had descended more than half-way, when something moved in the mist 100 yards below him. A turn of the road hid it from his sight, but as he came round the next bend he saw it again, a grey figure toiling slowly up the hill towards him. . . . Here was somebody who could tell him the truth! He sprang forward; then an irresistible shrinking of his soul from knowing—perchance, the worst, arrested his feet. He drew back into the shadow of a clump of alder, and stood there motionless, waiting till the figure should have gone by.

It approached. . . . It was only a yard or so away from him. . . . Then, suddenly, time vanished: and he was staring through the mist at the same little girl with eyes blinded by weeping, and dishevelled red hair, from whom he had parted in the Brocksden schoolroom, nearly seven years before. . . . With one stride he was standing in the road across her path.

"*Clytie!*"

She started violently, letting the plaid which protected her from the rain slip from her shoulders, and, staring at him with terror in her eyes—"Is this—an—other ghost?" she stammered, and suddenly swayed forward. He sprang to catch her. Taking her in his arms and wrapping the plaid tenderly round her, he carried her to the side of the road, and sitting down on a stone held her

to his bosom, pressing her cold hands to his lips, passionately kissing her unconscious face, entreating her to waken and look at him. "It's Gavin come back, darling. It's Gavin—come back"—he kept reiterating, until at last she stirred, sighed, and opened her eyes. They gazed up at him, at first dreamily, then with recognition struggling against bewilderment. Her hands clasped his neck. She burst into tears and hid her face against his heart.

"O, Clytie. . . . I thought I had lost you. . . . I had a horrible fancy, that—— Darling—whose grave is it, up above?"

His arms tightened round her. Sobbing, she answered—"Nanna's": while, in her heart with speechless humility and thankfulness, she acknowledged:

"But for the mercy of God, I should be lying there too."

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